Lost in Love found Life

Love Story of True Soulmates That teaches true meaning of Life

Anonymous A close acquaintance of Rakesh who witnessed this story unfold

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Love Story of True Soulmates That teaches true meaning of Life

by Anonymous

A close acquaintance of Rakesh, who witnessed this story unfold.

Dedication

This book is dedicated to the positive energy of love,

and to those who understand that love is not about getting something,

but about giving — completely, silently, and without expectation.

Preface

Sometimes, two souls meet not to complete each other,

but to awaken what lies sleeping within.

This story is not about romance in the ordinary sense —

it is about recognition, about karma, destiny, and divine timing.

Lost in Love – found Life

– The Story That Time Couldn’t End and teaches true meaning of life is inspired by real emotions and real lessons, about a connection that defied time yet obeyed truth.

Love, after all, is not possession.

It is evolution.

It teaches us that even silence can be sacred —

and that sometimes, separation is just the soul's way of saying,

"We'll meet again, when light remembers us."

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Chapter 1 - The First Connect

The ceiling fans of the small café hummed above the murmur of late-nineties in Indore. Outside, scooters lined the kerb; inside, a faint tune from a radio drifted through the clinking of cups. It was still the age when love letters were folded in envelopes, yet the first chatrooms had begun to steal hearts.

Rakesh adjusted his watch again—five minutes early, as always. The son of a modest business family, he wore punctuality like a badge of respect. His father often said, "Business sikhna hai toh samay ka mol samajh." So even for a casual meeting suggested by his sister's college friend, he arrived prepared—clean shirt, calm face, heart pounding like an over-wound clock.

The doorbell jingled and in swept Renu: a breeze in human form. Sky-blue kurta, a messy strand of hair escaping its clip, laughter already ready on her lips.

She spotted the table, waved at the familiar face of her sister across the room, and then looked at the man she was supposed to "just meet over coffee."

"Hi… Rakesh?"

"Yes… Renu?"

The first few seconds stretched—awkward, electric. Then she broke the silence.

"So, you're the serious one everyone warned me about?"

He smiled. "And you're the cheerful one they warned me about."

They laughed; the ice melted.

The conversation began with the usual courtesies but soon found its rhythm. She spoke about her work—how she'd started earning early after her father passed, how her mother and sisters shared everything from house chores to late-night jokes. "We don't have a man of the house," she said lightly, "so we all became one in turns."

Rakesh listened more than he spoke. He told her about his studies, his plan to move out for further education, his belief that discipline was freedom.

"You really believe that?" she asked.

He nodded. "If I don't plan, I panic."

"Then you'll panic a lot if you ever fall in love," she teased.

The sisters at the corner table giggled. One called out, "Bas karo tum dono! Pehli meeting mein hi saari baatein kar logey kya?"

They both turned, caught mid-laugh, like two children scolded for whispering in class. The interruption froze the moment, but the silence that followed was tender. Something unspoken had already begun.

When the coffee arrived, steam fogged Renu's glasses. She removed them, squinting at him.

"You have kind eyes," she said simply.

"And you," he replied before thinking, "have fearless ones."

For a second, she looked away, shy and amused. "Fearless? You don't even know me."

He stirred his coffee. "Maybe not. But sometimes you recognise people you haven't met yet."

Outside, the winter sun slipped behind the college wall. They didn't notice. When the sisters finally insisted it was time to leave, both Rakesh and Renu felt as if a good book had been shut mid-page.

He offered to pay; she protested. They split the bill.

At the door she said, half-joking, half-hopeful, "So… will the serious one ever smile again?"

He did—and that smile, nervous and genuine, was the first line of a story neither of them knew they had just begun.

💘 End of Chapter 1 – The First Connect

Chapter 2 - The Fast-Paced Love

Rakesh left the café that evening carrying a strange lightness.

For a man who measured life by timetables, he suddenly found himself walking slower, smiling at nothing in particular.

Renu's voice kept replaying in his head—half teasing, half wise.

That night he opened his diary and wrote:

"Sometimes, one meeting plants a thought that refuses to leave.

I don't know what this is, but it feels… alive."

3M

Weeks became months.

Letters turned into short phone calls arranged by their sisters—then, inevitably, private messages.

It was the turn of the millennium; internet cafés smelled of instant coffee and hope.

Their names began appearing on each other's "recently sent" lists.

"Hi Serious One," she typed one night.

He replied, "Hi Fearless One."

That became their ritual greeting.

Renu wrote from her small office cubicle between client calls; Rakesh wrote from the university library, his books spread like a fortress around him.

Their conversations flowed easily—childhood stories, music, their shared dislike for pretence.

He found her laughter healing; she found his patience rare.

Rakesh came home that evening with a strange restlessness in his chest.

The coffee-shop meeting with Renu replayed in flashes — her lively gestures, her curious questions, the way her laughter folded into the room like soft light.

He had tried to appear composed, but his heart was still beating slightly faster than usual.

His grandmother noticed it instantly.

Dadi sat on her old wooden swing in the courtyard, knitting wool threads into a half-finished sweater.

Her eyes were cloudy with age but sharp enough to catch every unspoken feeling.

As he entered, she tilted her head.

“Rakesh… tujhe dekh ke lagta hai aaj kuch alag hua hai,” she said, with a knowing smile.

He tried to laugh it off.

“Kuch nahi, Dadi… bas aise hi.”

“Beta,” she chuckled softly, “jo baat aankhon mein dikh rahi ho, usse zubaan se chhupaya nahi jaa sakta.”

Rakesh sat beside her, resting his head lightly on her shoulder — something he had not done in years.

There was comfort, familiarity, and a peace that only she could give him.

“Dadi,” he finally whispered, “aaj kisi se mila tha.”

Her knitting paused.

“Achha? Ladki se?”

His silence was answer enough.

She resumed knitting, but now her tone softened.

“Rakesh, listen… life partner koi khubsurti, hansi-mazak ya ek-do mulaqaton se nahi milta.

Life partner woh hota hai jo tumhari baat sun sake, tumhe samajh sake.

Aur sabse important — tumhe izzat de aur tum bhi usse dil se respect kar sako.”

Her words sank deep.

Rakesh looked at his hands.

“Dadi, I feel like I should settle first… get a position, earn respect, build something.

Without that, how can I even think of marriage?”

Dadi nodded slowly.

“Bilkul sahi.

Pehle apna kad badhao, apni pehchaan banao.

Tabhi toh tum kisi ka sahara ban paoge.

Agar aaj tumhe yeh ladki pasand aayi hai, toh waqt bhi sahi chahiye.

Jab tak tum khud strong nahi ho jaate, tab tak koi rishta bhi strong nahi hota.”

Those lines touched something in him — a truth he always felt but never articulated.

He held her hand.

“Dadi, I want to earn something real… something that gives me and my future family stability.”

She smiled like she already knew this would be his answer.

“Beta, tum mere sabse samajhdaar poote ho.

Jo faisla tum logon ka hota hai, vo hamesha Socha Samjha hi hota hai.

Bus ek baat yaad rakhna — izzat dene wala partner hi zindagi mein izzat deta hai.”

That night, he opened his laptop and began seriously exploring international opportunities.

Singapore’s offer had been lying in his inbox for months — but suddenly, the decision felt clear, purposeful.

He wanted to become a man worthy of a respectful partnership, not a boy rushing into marriage.

3M

But destiny wasn’t done with him yet.

Within a few weeks of that heartfelt conversation, his grandmother’s health deteriorated unexpectedly.

She slipped away one quiet evening, blessing the family with her last smile.

Rakesh was shattered.

His world suddenly felt empty — the courtyard swing, the knitting needles, her voice guiding him… all gone in a single breath.

During the rituals, his Buaji sat beside him.

“Rakesh beta, ab Dadi chali gayi… ghar mein sab tum par hi depend karenge.

Ab shaadi ka soch lo.

Ladki ko ghar le aao phir bahar jaana.

Pehle ghar basa lo, phir duniya jeetna.”

He lifted his eyes slowly, still swollen from days of crying.

“Bua ji… yeh bahut purani soch hai.

Main shaadi karke use ghar ki caretaker bana ke nahi jaa sakta.

Marriage caretaker ke liye nahi hoti.”

She frowned, “Par beta—”

He cut her gently, “Nahi Bua ji.

Jis ladki se shaadi karunga, usse chhod kar turant bahar chale jaana… this is not right."

A silence lingered.

He continued softly,

"Dadi ke jaane ke turant baad koi shubh kaam karna bhi uchit nahi hota.

Auspicious decisions should not be taken when grief is fresh.

Let things settle."

His words carried maturity far beyond his age.

Even his Bua nodded reluctantly.

That night, he stepped out into the terrace and looked at the moon.

His heart whispered, "Singapore… opportunity… independence… respect…"

He felt as if Dadi's wisdom was guiding him even from beyond —

telling him to rise first, love later.

And so he took the decision.

He accepted the Singapore job — not to run away, but to step upward.

To become the version of himself who could offer both respect and stability to someone deserving.

Little did he know…

that the girl he had met in that coffee shop would soon return into his story —

not by accident,

but by destiny.

When Rakesh received the job offer from Singapore, he should have been ecstatic.

It was the dream he'd chased for years: a solid position, a visa, a ticket to prove himself.

Yet, packing his bags felt strangely heavy.

At the airport, his sister asked why he looked worried.

He smiled faintly. “Bas aisa lagta hai, kuch adhura reh gaya.”

3M

Singapore was clean, efficient, and lonely.

His rented studio overlooked the river; the city lights reflected like scattered coins on water.

He worked long hours, spoke little, lived on instant noodles and ambition.

Every night, after the noise of traffic faded, he would sit by the window, check his email, and wait.

Then—ding!—her message.

Renu: “So, Mr Timetable, what’s for dinner?”

Rakesh: “Whatever cooks in three minutes.”

Renu: “Poor thing. When I come there, I’ll make something better.”

Rakesh: “Then come soon.”

He didn’t realise how easily those three words carried a wish.

3M

Renu’s life back home was its own whirlwind.

Between deadlines, market visits, and taking care of her mother, she found herself thinking of him at odd hours.

She liked his steadiness, the quiet humour that surfaced when he relaxed.

Her friends teased, “Office crush hai?”

She shook her head, smiling. “Nahi yaar… yeh thoda alag hai.”

They hadn’t confessed anything yet, but affection hung in every word.

The distance between Indore and Singapore shrank to the size of a screen.

3M

One night, after weeks of chatting, he wrote:

“I’ll send you the visa invitation soon… but what relation should I write?”

She read it twice, heart racing, then replied,

“Relation fix kar lo pehle, fir likh dena.”

It was the simplest proposal in the world—funny, shy, and utterly final.

He stared at her message for a long time, then whispered the lines he’d grown up believing:

“Prarabdh se pehle aur prarabdh se adhik kisi ko kuch nahi milta.

Agar wo meri kismet mein hai to nahi nahi jaa sakti.

Aur agar nahi hai to koi nahi mila sakta.”

For the first time, destiny didn't feel like a concept—it felt like a person.

3M

Their families, already aware of their friendship, saw the change.

Renu's sister teased her mercilessly; Rakesh's mother, though uncertain, agreed to "at least meet the girl properly."

Plans for a traditional roka began to form.

Renu was thrilled, nervous, and restless all at once.

Rakesh, meticulous as ever, made spreadsheets of travel dates, budgets, and gift ideas.

It amused her endlessly. "You're making Excel sheets for love now?" she joked.

He answered, "For you, even my formulas will have emotions."

The night before he flew home for the ceremony, he stood by his window again.

The city below buzzed with neon and noise, but within him was a strange calm.

He wrote one more diary entry:

“Tomorrow begins a story that has waited lifetimes.

May I deserve what I desire.”

He closed the book, turned off the lights, and whispered a small prayer to the invisible connection that now shaped his world.

💛 End of Chapter 2 – The Fast-Paced Love

Chapter 3 - Roots of Faith

The peepal in Rakesh's village stood wider than two rooms of the house put together. Its roots had crept across the courtyard stones and wrapped themselves into the earth like old hands holding stories. The children called it the "big tree," but to the family — to Dada, to Dadi, to the small boy who would one day become a man making spreadsheets in a foreign city — it was a temple without walls.

Morning light came through the leaves like a blessing, scattering gold across the courtyard. Birds argued amiably from the branches. The old brass bell by the front door would tinkle when someone walked in, and the smell of chai would wrap the whole place in comfort. Rakesh learned the shape of the world here: how the day should begin with a prayer and how a hand offered to help was worth more than money counted.

He was the kind of child who listened in corners. While others raced to cricket or television, he would slip under the peepal with a handful of pebbles and sit, pretending to be a pundit. Dadi would catch him sometimes, pat his head, and pour him a small cup of sweetened tea. "Beta,"

she would say, “jo aadat zindagi mein acchi ho, use chhodo mat.” She said it like a promise, not a rule.

His father taught him business — the art of weighing, of bargaining, of remembering every person who’d ever stepped into the shop. “Hisaab rakhna,” he’d say, rolling the coins in his palm. But it was Dada, the grandfather who laughed like there was always more than enough, who taught him strategy. They would sit on the wooden crate in the shop’s corner, pieces of cardboard for a chessboard. Dada’s long fingers would move the knight with the ease of someone who had watched decades of people move on and off the stage of life.

“Four moves ahead,” Dada would whisper, tapping the game like it was a meter of time. “Agar tu aaj ka soch ke chal raha hai, beta, toh kal tere pair khokhle ho jayenge. Hamesha soch, mera laal—chaar step aage.”

Rakesh learned to see life as the chessboard. If someone delayed a bill, you made a note but also watched if that delay was a pattern. If a neighbor asked for credit, you remembered their face the next time goods came. His childhood practice of counting rice sacks, helping customers, keeping accounts — it wasn’t small. It was the grainwork of character. He learned to honor agreements,

to return change honestly, to never keep someone's extra penny because "wo bhi uska haq hai." It was simple — almost sacred — math of fairness.

And the rituals — they were the frame that held everything. Every Tuesday the family lit a lamp at the peepal and hung garlands on its branch. People from the village came, a kettle of sugar-laden tea shared between hands. They chanted, not loudly but with a certain stubborn faith. Rakesh learned the mantras like the alphabet. He watched how devotion turned ordinary hands into careful ones, how a bowed head softened bargaining into compassion.

When his father would worry about money, Dada would hush him with a tale. "Paise aate hai, paise jaate hai, beta. Par izzat ka hisaab alag hota hai. Agar izzat kamayi hai, duniya dekh ke sochti hai." Those words sank into Rakesh's bones.

Sometimes he would steal away to the peepal after school, lay his head against the tree's trunk, and imagine the tree breathing with him. It taught patience. The peepal did not hurry; it only grew. It reminded him that the deepest things — roots, reputation, righteousness — take seasons.

When misfortune struck the family — small things like a failed crop or bigger ones like late payments — the tree was their witness. They tied a thread around its trunk for healing, offered sweets when prayers were answered. The peepal held their petitions with a steady, ancient kind of hospitality. For Rakesh, faith and duty braided together there: duty to the family, duty to truth, and faith that steady acts would yield steady results.

Years later, when he would be in a distant foreign room with a city view and a buzz of fluorescent lights, he would sometimes close his eyes and find, in the hush of meditation, the exact sound of the peepal leaves brushing each other. The memory would come with birdsong and the smell of chai and Dadi's rough hand on his shoulder. It would slow his breath, bring his thinking back to "four moves" and to the small math of honesty — that if he ever had to choose, he would never keep someone's extra penny.

That was the man who went to the café for the first meeting with Renu — not just the young professional with plans, but a boy whose roots had been wrapped around a peepal, taught that sanctity was found in small rituals, and

that being respectful and steady wasn’t weakness but the quietest form of strength.

On nights when he felt unsteady, the peepal returned. Not as a place he could go to, but as a feeling — a soft, patient authority that told him to wait, to plan, and to do the next right thing. It became the voice he’d answer when life’s noise tried to make him rush.

Chapter 4 - The Chessboard of Life

Rakesh's earliest memories were not of toys or cartoons or birthday candles.

They were of the wooden chessboard that lived inside the old family shop —

the one his grandfather folded every night like a sacred cloth.

The shop itself was a world of rhythms:

the metallic click of shutters opening at dawn,

the scraping sound of sacks dragged across the floor,

the sweet smell of jaggery and the sharp scent of turmeric that clung to everything.

To a child, it felt like a universe built of tiny sounds and warm hands.

And at its center was Dada — tall, kind, patient, and always watchful.

"Come, Raja," Dada would call him in the afternoons,

using the pet name only he was allowed to use.

“Aaj phir ek game ho jaaye?”

Rakesh would run across the floor, dodging customers, his tiny feet thudding like rushed footsteps on a temple corridor.

He would perch on a wooden crate while Dada unfolded the chessboard.

The pieces were mismatched — some wooden, some plastic — yet they were treasures.

Dada placed the king gently on the square.

“You see this, Raja?

Yeh raja tab tak raja hai jab tak saari team saath hai.

Ek bhi hissa toot gaya toh poori taqat hil jaati hai.”

Even at ten, Rakesh understood.

Family was like a chessboard — every member held the structure together.

Lessons Beyond the Game

The lessons began simply.

“The pawn,” Dada would say, pointing,

“chhota hota hai, par himmat sabse badi hoti hai.

Agar hausla ho toh ye hi raja bann sakta hai.”

Rakesh’s eyes widened.

He loved the idea that the smallest piece could reach the end of the board and transform.

“The knight,” Dada taught,

“seedha nahi chalta.

Kabhi kabhi zindagi mein teeda sochna padta hai —

go sideways, find another path.”

Then came the rook.

“Sidha, seedha, seedha.

Kabhi-kabhi simple soch hi jeet dilati hai.”

And finally, the queen.

“Aur yeh… yeh sabse powerful.

Yeh tab taqatwar hoti hai jab raja secure ho.”

Dada smiled gently.

“Raja ki duty hoti hai — protect the one who protects him.”

Little Rakesh nodded, though he didn’t fully understand.

He would later — years later — when choosing between ambition and responsibilities, love and obligations.

The Four Moves Rule

One evening, after a particularly close game, Dada leaned in seriously.

“You know, Raja…

Zindagi bhi chess ki tarah hai.

Agar tum sirf ek move dekhoge, tum hamesha haar jaoge.”

He tapped the board.

“Victory belongs to the one who sees four moves ahead.”

He counted on his fingers.

“One — what you want.

Two — what the world wants from you.

Three — what consequences will follow.

Four — how you protect your future.”

Rakesh whispered, “Four moves ahead…”

Dada smiled.

“Haan.

Planning mat chhodo.

Dimag ko shant rakhna.

Impulse se aasani se log phisal jaate hain.”

Those words became Rakesh’s compass.

Even at school, when others lived in the now, he lived in the next ten steps.

When he helped his father in the shop, he anticipated customer needs.

When relatives visited, he knew before they asked what they wanted.

When exams came, he studied with a plan, not panic.

Dada had planted a seed —

the seed of foresight.

Of stability.

Of responsibility.

3M

The Day He Beat His Father

One humid afternoon, while rain clouds gathered outside,
Rakesh sat opposite his father on the chessboard.

His father played aggressively, moving pieces fast,
impatiently, as if life itself was a race.

But Rakesh had the four-move rule now.

He watched quietly.

He observed.

He planned.

His father captured his knight with a triumphant nod.

But Rakesh didn’t flinch.

Instead, he moved his bishop —

a quiet, precise, almost invisible move.

His father froze.

He hadn’t seen it coming.

Within three moves, checkmate.

Dada, watching from behind, burst into laughter.

“Ab samjhe?” he said, patting his son’s shoulder.

“Plan banaye bina aage mat badhna.

Har cheez — har rishta — har faisla —

chaar moves soch ke lena.”

Rakesh’s father smiled proudly.

But inside Rakesh, something deeper shifted.

For the first time, he understood what it meant to be prepared.

3M

The Chessboard Inside Him

Years later, when he sat with Renu on late-night calls,

her impulsive, lively, spontaneous nature made him smile…
and scared him too.

She believed in feelings first, logic later.

He believed in logic first, feelings woven around it.

She said,

“Love happens in the moment.”

He thought,

“Love must be planned for a lifetime.”

She said,

“Let’s decide fast.”

He whispered,

“Let’s see four steps ahead.”

When she asked,

“Why do you always think so much?”

he wanted to explain this chapter of his life —

how chess taught him that one reckless move can overturn futures.

But he couldn’t find the words then.

Now, under the soft glow of Singapore lights, when heartbreak crept close,

he realized something profound:

His entire life — his decisions, his career, his stability —

was shaped under that peepal tree and that wooden chessboard.

He didn’t overthink because he feared life.

He thought ahead because life had trained him to.

He wasn’t rigid.

He was prepared.

He wasn’t slow.

He was careful.

He wasn’t scared.

He was responsible.

And somewhere, in the deep corners of his heart,

he hoped that someday Renu would understand this too.

Chapter 5 - Evil's Eye

Renu could hardly sleep the night before the roka.

It felt unreal — the journey from that first coffee to this day had happened so quickly that even her heart was catching up.

Her mother, usually reserved, was glowing with pride.

"Dekha," she told her neighbours, "meri beti ke naseeb khul gaye."

In another country, Rakesh folded his shirts with the precision of a man who believed order could calm nerves.

He had decided he would not miss this day.

His manager in Singapore was surprised when he applied for urgent leave.

"Family event?" he asked.

Rakesh smiled, "Something like that."

He didn't tell anyone he was planning to appear unannounced.

On the morning of the ceremony, Renu's home smelled of sandalwood and marigolds.

Relatives had started pouring in — aunties discussing jewellery, cousins arranging sweets, and her sisters managing every detail.

The house was a festival of sound and colour.

Renu sat by the mirror, adjusting her earrings.

Her reflection smiled back nervously.

The sari was a soft rose-pink, a gift from Rakesh's mother.

She wore it carefully, making sure not a single pleat was out of place.

Her sister entered, whispering, "He must be watching on video, right?"

Renu nodded, "Haan… but still, it's not the same. I wish he were here."

Back in Singapore, Rakesh sat before his laptop, watching the live video feed.

Relatives bustled across the screen; voices overlapped.

His mother's face appeared occasionally, managing rituals.

He felt both proud and uneasy.

Something in him couldn't rest.

When his mother looked into the camera and said, "Beta, sab theek hai na, Sab kuch itna jaldi ho raha hai.

Waisey bhi tu padaai ke liye itney saalo baahar raha hai, Tum dono khush Rahna magar hamein chod mat dena,"

he caught the slight tremor in her voice.

That tone — half anxious, half possessive — was enough.

He booked the next available flight.

He reached India the next morning, just as the final preparations were starting.

Quietly, he entered the venue.

The house was buzzing with guests; nobody noticed him at first.

Then, Renu turned — and time stopped.

He stood there in a simple kurta, travel-worn, smiling.

She gasped, her hand flying to her mouth.

“You came?”

He nodded. “How could I not?”

For a moment, everything around them blurred — the voices, the rituals, the noise — just a silent current between two eyes that had waited lifetimes.

3M

The roka began with traditional chants.

Relatives applied tilak, exchanged gifts, and whispered blessings.

Everyone said, “Perfect match.”

Rakesh's mother smiled dutifully, though her eyes often wandered toward her son — measuring his happiness against her fears.

Later, during the lunch, she quietly said to him, "Beta, tumne faisla apne mann se liya. Par yaad rakhna, maa ka dar bhi ashirwad hota hai."

He held her hand. "Maa, sab theek hoga. Trust me."

But she couldn't shake the feeling that she was losing him to another world — a freer, younger one that didn't need her guidance.

3M

In the days that followed, Rakesh and Renu finally had time to be together — properly, openly, as an engaged couple. When their bond gets deeper and real love felt inside.

They walked through markets, shared kulfi, met friends who teased them shamelessly.

Rakesh admired her energy; she admired his calm.

They were discovering, in tiny ways, how love softens differences.

When they visited Rakesh's home, his mother welcomed Renu politely.

The warmth was there, but layered with formality.

Later, when Renu left, she said quietly to her son, "Acchi ladki hai… lekin tumhare jaisi nahi."

He smiled, "Bas dua karo, maa."

The roka ceremony had ended with laughter, rituals, and blessings from all sides.

But for Rakesh and Renu, the real magic began after the rituals — in those quiet, stolen hours where they finally roamed openly as a committed couple.

That evening, they slipped out to a small café in Indore.

It was almost empty, the soft yellow lights giving the space a warm, intimate glow.

They chose a corner table.

Renu stirred her cappuccino absentmindedly, then looked at him with a tender smile.

"I still can't believe you came," she said softly.

“Virtual roka bhi ho jaata. But tum aa gaye.”

Rakesh smiled. “Kuch cheezein screen pe achhi nahi lagti.

Roka… tum… ye sab real hona chahiye tha.”

She leaned closer, her eyes gentle.

“You know, I liked that.

Tumne mere dil ki baat samajh li.

Mujhe kuch kehna bhi nahi pada.

I hope… future mein bhi tum mujhe bina mere bolay samajh jaoge.”

Rakesh nodded, though something about her tone made him pause.

It wasn’t a complaint.

It was an expectation — a silent dream she held tightly.

He didn’t know that at the back of her mind, she already pictured a future with him in Singapore…

a life where she could walk freely with him on foreign streets, start afresh, settle fast, and leave behind old struggles.

Rakesh, however, was thinking of patience and pace.

But he didn’t voice it.

Tonight wasn’t meant for reality — it was meant for warmth.

Days of Discovery

Over the next few days, they visited many of Rakesh’s relatives in Indore.

Some welcomed her wholeheartedly; others observed her with quiet curiosity.

Renu, naturally friendly, impressed many with her cheerful presence.

At each home, someone or the other would whisper,

“Bohot sundar jodi hai,”

or

“Ladki samajhdaar lagti hai.”

With every introduction, Rakesh felt a small pride blooming inside him.

He admired how easily she blended with everyone — laughing, listening, offering help.

Soon after, they traveled to Jaipur together to meet Renu’s relatives.

The city felt vibrant — pink walls glowing beneath the winter sun, the smell of spices floating in the air.

Rakesh felt welcomed, even pampered.

And Renu seemed happy — almost glowing in her own city.

3M

The Jaipur Evening

One evening in Jaipur, Renu insisted,

“Chalo, I’ll introduce you to some of my office friends!”

They reached a rooftop café where two couples were already waiting.

The friends greeted her with excited squeals and warm hugs.

One of them said, “Oh my God, Renu, you finally brought him!”

For a while, everything felt normal — comfortable even.

But slowly, Rakesh noticed a change.

Her friends were extremely talkative, bold, and loud.

The conversation drifted from office gossip to travel plans, then to jokes he couldn’t quite follow.

And Renu…

she got swept away.

Laughing freely, telling stories, forgetting he was new to this world.

Twice, someone walked over to greet her — an ex-colleague, a neighbour — and she chatted without introducing him.

Rakesh sat quietly, smiling politely, absorbing everything.

He didn't feel ignored… just misplaced.

As if he was a visitor in her world, not a part of it.

Later, when they walked in the market, her charm attracted several acquaintances.

"Arre Renu! Long time!"

"Hey, join us this weekend!"

She responded warmly each time, forgetting to mention,

"This is Rakesh… my fiancé."

He didn't mind — not outwardly.

But somewhere inside him, a small doubt flickered:

"Yeh dono duniyaan ek saath chal payengi kya?"

He tucked the thought away.

Today was not the day to question.

Today was to understand, not judge.

3M

The Delhi Stop

After Jaipur, Renu travelled with him for a quick stop at her sister’s place in Delhi.

They roamed the malls, had ice cream at India Gate, took silly pictures, and enjoyed their last day before his flight.

Delhi’s winter evening had a softness to it —

the kind that made the air smell of roasted peanuts, car horns sound distant,

and every moment feel slightly more cinematic than real life.

Rakesh and Renu stepped out of the metro station near Connaught Place, walking shoulder to shoulder.

It was their last evening together before he would fly back to Singapore.

Neither said it aloud, but both felt the weight of that ticking clock.

“Movie dekhte hai?” Renu suggested suddenly, her eyes lighting up.

“Last night together… should be special.”

Rakesh smiled. “Anything you want.”

They walked into the theatre, two tickets in hand, a gentle nervousness between them —

the kind lovers feel when time is slipping,

and hearts are opening faster than they should.

Inside the dark hall, they found their seats.

The film had already begun, the screen glowing with soft romantic light.

Renu sat beside him, close enough that he could feel the warmth of her sleeve brushing his.

For a while, they watched quietly.

Then came the song.

“Mere haath mein tera haath ho,

Saari jannatein mere saath ho…”

As the music filled the hall, something shifted inside both of them.

Renu turned slightly —

and without a word, she slowly slid her fingers into his.

Rakesh froze.

His heart, always disciplined, always measured, forgot its rhythm for a moment.

Her hand was warm.

Soft.

Real.

He closed his fingers around hers —

gently at first, then with the kind of sincerity that says

I don’t know the future, but I know this moment is true.

Renu didn’t look at him.

She kept her eyes on the screen, a faint smile on her lips,

as if she had already imagined a hundred tomorrows with him.

He leaned back in his seat, but he didn’t let go.

For the first time in his life,

he wasn’t planning,

wasn’t analyzing,

wasn’t measuring outcomes.

He was simply feeling.

Her pulse.

His pulse.

The rhythm of a song that seemed written for them.

At one point, she rested her head lightly on his shoulder.

It lasted only a few seconds,

but to him it felt like an eternity folded neatly into a single breath.

Outside in the world, thousands of people went about their ordinary lives.

Inside that theatre, time had stopped.

When the song ended, she whispered,

“Rakesh…”

“Hm?”

“Kabhi haath mat chhodna, okay?”

He tightened his grip, a promise forming in his chest.

“Never.”

She smiled — a smile so pure it carved itself into his memory permanently.

After the Movie

They walked out in silence, still holding hands.

Delhi’s cold breeze brushed past them,

but their palms stayed warm —

almost glowing in the streetlights.

They walked around the Inner Circle,

talked about nothing and everything,

shared hot coffee from a roadside stall,

and laughed about future plans they didn’t know would remain dreams.

At the taxi stand, she tugged his hand softly.

“Time is running,” she whispered.

He nodded.

But neither moved.

Finally, she said,

“Promise me… you won’t forget this evening.”

He looked at her — really looked.

“Renu…

yeh shaam…

yeh gaana…

yeh haath…

meri poori zindagi mein kabhi nahi bhool sakta.”

Her eyes softened.

For a moment, it felt like destiny itself held its breath.

He opened the taxi door for her.

She stepped in, but before closing it, she reached out again
—

held his hand one last time.

Not long.

Just long enough.

Then the door closed.

And the cab drove away slowly,

taking with it the girl who had just written herself into his soul.

As the taxi tail-lights disappeared,

Rakesh looked at his palm —

as if her warmth was still imprinted there.

And it was.

Forever.

Lastly at the airport, she hugged him a little longer than expected.

“Take care, okay?

Aur… jaldi bula lena.”

Her eyes said more than her words —

bring me soon, take me with you, don’t delay life.

Rakesh smiled gently, unaware of the storm the next weeks would bring.

As he walked toward the departure gate, he looked back —

she waved, smiling brightly.

He waved back.

It felt complete.

Warm.

Hopeful.

But inside him, a faint mix of joy and confusion lingered —

too subtle to disturb him now,

but strong enough to grow later.

When he reached Singapore, exhaustion caught up with him.

Yet there was something else — a strange heaviness.

He replayed the Jaipur evening in his mind.

Her laughter, her casual energy, the ease with which she mingled with the world.

“Hum kitne alag hain,” he whispered to himself.

And so, late that night, he opened his laptop and began typing —

a long message, honest, vulnerable, soft:

- What he felt
- What he feared
- What he hoped
- And how he wanted to take things slow to avoid future clashes

He didn’t write out of insecurity.

He wrote out of sincerity.

He hit send,

never knowing how much that letter would change everything that followed.

Before returning abroad, Renu had handed him a small, carefully wrapped box.

“Open it only after you reach,” she said.

Inside was a delicate glass idol of Lord Ganesha — her own favourite deity.

“Ye tumhare liye,” she said. “It’ll protect you in a new country. And remind you of me.”

He promised he would keep it safe.

On the flight back, he held the box close in his backpack, feeling strangely peaceful.

When he reached Singapore, he unpacked carefully, placing the idol on his bedside table.

It caught the morning light, scattering rainbows on the wall.

For two days, it stood there — a small, shimmering symbol of everything right in his life.

On the third day, as he returned home late from work, he found it shattered — cleanly, perfectly, in two pieces.

He froze.

The air felt heavy, still.

He picked up the fragments and sat down on the floor.

The room seemed to echo with the priest's words from the roka:

"Buri nazar jaldi lag jaati hai achhe logo ko."

He wasn't superstitious. Yet, something inside him knew — this was not random.

He whispered to himself, "Maybe love, too, is fragile glass."

He wrapped the broken idol in a soft cloth, placed it gently in the drawer, and stared at it for a long time.

That night, sleep refused to come.

He opened his laptop and began typing a letter.

3M

Renu,

The roka was beautiful — but I realised that love isn't just about two hearts, it's also about two worlds.

We are similar, yet different in how we see life.

You love freedom; I love structure.

You live through laughter; I live through silence.

But I don't know which of us is right — maybe both are.

Sometimes, I wonder whether I'll ever be enough for your energy,

or you for my peace.

I’m not scared, just thoughtful.

Let’s take a little time before we rush into anything.

— Rakesh

He didn’t send it immediately.

He reread it the next morning, softened a few words, and had hesitated before sending that long, heartfelt letter.

He wrote it in honesty, not accusation — but as soon as he clicked Send, a fear crept in.

Had he said too much?

Would she misunderstand?

He didn’t sleep well that night.

Every time his phone buzzed, his heart jumped.

But no reply came.

He waited the whole next day — still nothing.

Then, late in the evening, her message flashed.

“Rakesh… I am deeply hurt by your letter.”

His breath caught.

Before he could type anything, another message appeared:

“But hurt doesn’t mean we are breaking.

We are still together na?

Differences hote hain.

Don’t think too much…

I want you happy.

And I will keep you happy.”

Rakesh exhaled — long, slow, relieved.

Her words felt warm, almost tender.

A moment later, her call came.

When he answered, she didn’t say hello.

She simply said,

“Pagal ho tum… itna sochte kyun ho?”

He laughed softly for the first time in days.

Just like that, the distance dissolved.

Their voices found each other again.

3M

The Flow of Everyday Love

From the next morning onward, their routine became sacred.

Daily calls.

Daily messages.

Daily video meetings.

They talked about everything — serious things, silly things, dreams, fears, and moments so ordinary they became intimate.

Renu shared all her little quirks.

“I get ready so fast,” she said proudly once.

“I’m not like other girls who take one hour for makeup.

Five minutes — and I’m done.”

Rakesh laughed, “Tab toh main dare se ready ho jaaya karunga.”

On another evening, she showed him her small Reiki corner — a candle, a bowl of water, and a few crystals.

“I don’t depend on medicines,” she said.

“For small problems, body heals itself.

Energy is everything.”

He listened with calm admiration.

Her voice carried a childish enthusiasm mixed with an old soul’s faith.

In return, Rakesh opened up corners of his life he rarely spoke about — memories stitched with hardship and innocence.

“I started managing our shop when I was in fifth standard,” he said quietly.

“School, homework, business — that was my life.”

Renu gasped.

“Fifth standard? That’s too small!”

He smiled.

“Nahi. Itna mushkil nahi tha.

Dadaji ke saath hota tha… that made everything fun.”

He told her about those days:

how he and his grandfather stole moments of joy in the middle of work —

playing chess on an overturned wooden box,

eating pani puris from the shop across the street,

laughing till customers stared.

Renu listened with a softness he could feel even through the screen.

“Kash main bhi un dino mein hoti,” she said.

“Bohot cute memories hain.”

He felt seen — truly seen.

3M

Renu’s Strength Revealed

In return, she shared her own story.

After her father passed away early during their Delhi days, the family was shaken.

Jobs shifted, finances fluctuated, and they finally moved back to Jaipur.

“Tabse hi hum teenon sisters aur mummy ek team ban gaye,” she said.

“Papa ka loss ne hame bada bana diya.

Jaldi responsible ho gayi main.”

The honesty in her voice touched him.

He felt connected to her pain — the kind that makes people grow before time.

3M

Two Philosophies, One Bond

One night, during a relaxed conversation, she teased him,

“You’re too serious in life.”

He grinned, “And you’re too carefree.”

She shrugged, “Carefree hi banna chahiye.

Good things follow you when your heart is light.”

He countered,

“Success comes from thoughtful planning.

Life must be calculated to stay protected.”

She laughed, “Arre baba, jo prapt hai, woh paryaapt hai!”

He replied, smiling,

“Dream big. Sky has no limit.”

It struck both of them how different their philosophies were.

Yet those differences felt beautiful — like two pieces of music blending into a symphony neither could create alone.

Their calls became the balance of their worlds:

her laughter softening his seriousness,

his wisdom grounding her excitement.

For those few weeks…

they felt like two souls learning how to hold each other gently.

💛 End of Chapter – Evil's Eye

🆓

Chapter 6 – The Attempt to Prove Love

The roka had ended like a dream wrapped in rituals — smiles, selfies, and a thousand blessings.

For Renu, it felt like the beginning of forever.

For Rakesh, it felt like standing at the edge of something sacred — fragile, glowing, and suddenly real.

Back in Singapore, he opened her email folder daily — every “good morning,” every “miss you,” felt like oxygen.

They spoke over video calls, exchanged pictures of their meals, shared playlists, argued over silly things like time zones and movie choices.

“Do you even sleep?” Renu teased one night.

“Not when I’m waiting for you,” he said simply.

They laughed — and believed this rhythm would last forever.

But love, like life, follows its own clock.

Renu’s messages grew shorter; her replies slower.

Sometimes she’d say she was tired, sometimes she’d just disappear for a day.

Rakesh noticed — of course he did.

He noticed everything.

He began writing longer emails, trying to fill the silence.

In one of them, he confessed what had been running through his mind since the roka:

“You are practical and lively, Renu — you love the world, you shine wherever you go.

I’m quiet, structured, maybe too serious sometimes.

I wonder if I’ll fit into your world, or if you’ll ever feel trapped in mine.”

She replied within minutes.

“You think too much.

Stop analysing love like an equation, Mr. Timetable.

It’s simple — I care for you. You care for me. That’s enough.”

Her confidence soothed him for a while, but not for long.

He wanted to believe her words completely, yet something restless inside whispered otherwise.

3M

Work in Singapore became intense.

Late nights, client calls, endless reports.

He began missing their scheduled chats.

When he’d finally message, Renu would be asleep.

He once told her, “Yaar, this distance is testing me. Sometimes I feel like I’m holding air and calling it love.”

She replied, “Then let’s meet soon — why wait?”

“Not yet,” he said. “I need to level up, get stable, then everything will be perfect.”

She sighed, “Perfection ruins love, Rakesh. Just be present.”

He wanted to say I’m trying, but the words stayed trapped between his mind and mouth.

Hisaab vs. The Little White Lie

On a rainy Thursday evening, when Singapore’s skyline was only a row of cold lights and Rakesh’s apartment hummed quietly, he and Renu sat on a call that began, as usual, with jokes and ended somewhere meaningful.

Somewhere between her laughter and his thoughtful silences, the conversation slipped into the small, decisive corners of life — the things that actually build character.

“Tum log business waale sab toh hisaab-nama ke deewane ho na?” Renu teased, stirring her tea in Jaipur with a casual grace. “Har choti cheez count karte ho — paise, time, subah-ki-chai…”

Rakesh smiled, a little embarrassed. “Hisaab rakhna zaroori hota hai. Agar hisaab saaf nahi toh bhool-bhulaiya ho jaata hai. Par hisaab sirf paise ka nahi— respect ka bhi hota hai.”

Renu’s eyes softened. “Maine ek aur soch rakhi hai — agar sach se kisi ka bhala hota hai, toh woh jhooth bhi bolna chahiye. Small lies for good — harmless. Give someone happiness, even if the truth complicates.”

His brow furrowed. “Maine waise kabhi socha nahi. For me, agar main kisi ka jhooth sunn leta hoon, then I might be stealing a lesson or a right from them. Hisaab matlab responsibility. If someone gives you extra, return it. If someone expects you to be honest, be honest.”

She laughed softly, the kind of laugh that warmed him and irritated him in equal measure. “But RJ, life is not a ledger. Life is messy. Suppose your friend borrows money and returns it late. You correct your ledger — but what if the friend needed that money for something important and

was ashamed to tell you? A small lie — ‘Arre koi baat nahi’ — heals. It keeps dignity intact.”

Rakesh listened. He imagined his Dadi’s hands folding prayers and Dada moving a knight across a chessboard. “Hisaab is also about dignity,” he said slowly. “If I keep someone’s extra penny, it’s stealing their honesty. If I return it, I’m honoring their right. I think honesty is the backbone of trust. Without it, relationships bend.”

Renu tapped her chin. “So you think every secret must be exposed? Every white lie punished?”

“No,” he said, “but there is a difference between mercy and manipulation. If the lie protects someone’s feelings and both know it’s harmless, maybe okay. But if it starts protecting someone’s habit of not taking responsibility, then the lie becomes part of the problem.”

She nodded, the conversation now soft and intimate. “Like last month at work — I moved a client’s meeting, told them some scheduling issue. But behind the scene, I had arranged a better deal for them. I didn’t want the client to refuse because of pride. It worked. They trusted me more because there was an outcome. Tell me that’s not useful.”

Rakesh's eyes searched hers through the screen. "You're saying a little deception can make better outcomes?"

"Not deception," she corrected. "Adjustment. Strategy with softness. If the end result is better for the person, and no one is harmed, then it's smart."

He remembered a story Dada once told him about a grocer who always returned a customer's extra change even if the customer didn't notice. The grocer said, "Insaan ki izzat hi uski sabse badi daulat hai." Rakesh believed that honesty compounded into respect: small acts created a reputation that unfolded into community trust.

Renu, on the other hand, believed in agile kindness — bending rules to create happiness. She had seen it during hard times in her family: when her mother, exhausted from work, lied to a neighbour to avoid shame; when her sister told a boss a small fabrication to save a job. These were acts of survival and care. They were not malicious; they were pragmatic.

“So what do we do when both are right?” Renu asked, softer now. “You with your hisaab, and me with my small mercies?”

Rakesh inhaled, the way one breathes before making an honest promise. “Maybe we keep both — like two pillars. Hisaab for fairness, and compassion for when fairness would crush. Let fairness be the rule, and compassion the exception — explained, agreed, not hidden.”

Renu smiled, eyes bright. “Wow, RJ. You sound like a philosopher now.”

“And you sound like a rebel with a heart.”

They both laughed. A comfortable silence settled. The rain outside tapped a gentle rhythm on both their windows—two cities same in sound, different in distance.

That night, before they said goodnight, Renu whispered, “Promise me, RJ, if ever I cross the line, tell me. Don’t just accept.”

He looked at the small video box on his laptop where her face glowed in the dark. “And you promise me — if honesty hurts, explain why you couldn’t tell. Don’t hide.”

“I promise,” she said.

They hung on each other’s promise like a small treaty. In the months ahead, this tiny agreement — the balancing of hisaab and small mercies — would be their compass. It would not prevent pain, but it would teach them how to navigate it; how to argue less about being right, and more about being true.

Sharp Edges in a Soft Heart

It was a late evening in Singapore for Rakesh, and an early winter morning in Jaipur for Renu.

Their video call was already an hour long — the kind where you lose track of time not because you’re talking about grand things, but because small truth-after-truth quietly unfolds.

Renu was still in her office clothes, hair tied up, her ID card hanging around her neck.

“You’re still working?” Rakesh asked, surprised.

She shrugged, “Abhi ek client ka fund transfer finish karna tha. Boss ne bola hold karwa do thoda. Toh I did.”

He frowned. “Hold? Matlab delay kar diya? Why?”

Renu leaned back in her chair, stretching casually.

“Because timing is everything, Rakesh.

If I release the payment earlier, the client will think hum desperate hai.

If I delay slightly, he’ll assume we’re negotiating something better for him.

It’s all strategy.”

Rakesh blinked, trying to process this.

“But… isn’t that unfair? Agar kaam ho gaya toh immediately kar dena chahiye.”

Renu laughed, the kind of laugh that had both innocence and mischief.

“Arre baba, you’re too straight. World straight nahi hai.

People take advantage of straight people.”

He stayed quiet, absorbing it.

Renu continued, not noticing his internal shift.

“Look, RJ… humari field mein,” she said, tapping her pen,

“everyone delays things — payments, meetings, replies, deadlines.

Not because they’re dishonest, but because the world runs on leverage.

If you show your cards early, you get the worst deal.

You have to be quick, sharp, unpredictable. That’s how you survive.”

He nodded slowly, even though his mind was searching for a counter-argument.

“Ab dekho,” she added, leaning closer, “today I told a client there was a technical error.

But truth? I wanted a better rate.

Am I evil?

No.

Am I dishonest?

Maybe a little.

But I’m protecting my company, my boss’s trust, and my salary.”

Rakesh looked at her intently. “Does this not bother you?”

“Not even 1%,” she said confidently.

“Because intention matters.

My intention was good — secure a benefit for my end.

Harm kisi ko nahi hua.”

His silence stretched, so she softened her tone.

“See RJ… we grew up different.

You learned values from family business — honesty, hisaab, returning money.

I learned values from life storms — if you don’t play sharp, you get crushed.”

He finally spoke.

“But doesn’t it confuse the heart? Lying a little, hiding a little… doesn’t it hurt you inside?”

She paused for the first time.

Her eyes became distant, remembering a different time, a different city.

“You know RJ… when Papa passed away in Delhi, everything changed.

We were three sisters and one mother in that small rented flat.

Bills kept increasing.

Mummy cried every night, hiding her tears in the pillow.

That’s when I understood — life doesn’t give you fairness.

You have to create your own.”

She took a slow breath.

“Sometimes, I said things to landlords to get extra days for rent.

Sometimes I gave excuses at office to save my job.

Sometimes I pretended to be strong when inside I was breaking.

Those lies weren’t bad.

They protected us.

They kept our home running.”

Rakesh softened.

Her sharp edges made sense now —

they were carved by survival, not selfishness.

She looked at him with a faint, almost vulnerable smile.

“I don’t like cheating. I don’t like hurting anyone.

But I use my mind.

I learned to slip through cracks in life.

Not for advantage — for safety.”

He nodded.

“And I grew up in a world where maintaining exact hisaab meant dignity,” he said.

“If someone gave us more money by mistake, we returned it.

If someone owed us, we reminded them politely.

If a cheque came late, we waited with patience.

Not because we were saints —

because it felt wrong to take what wasn’t ours.”

Renu smiled.

“And I grew up where taking what came your way was survival, not greed.”

Two different worlds.

Two different ethics.

Both true.

Both honest in their own ways.

She leaned closer to the screen and whispered,

“RJ… tum seedhe ho. That’s why I like you.

And I want to keep my sharpness too.

If we blend, we will work beautifully.”

Rakesh smiled — a quiet smile.

He didn’t know whether life would blend them or break them.

But in that moment, their honesty felt like a warm blanket —

soft, protective, hopeful.

When Two Souls Unburden

It started like most ordinary nights — a little too late, a little too warm, two small windows glowing in different cities.

Rakesh had finished work, the apartment quiet except for a distant hum of traffic and the steady rhythm of the AC.

Renu sat on her balcony in Jaipur, a cup of masala chai cooling beside her, the winter sky clear and a sliver of moon watching like a witness.

They called each other without ceremony. The screens lit their faces like two small altars.

“Hi,” she said, voice soft as if she were trying not to disturb something sacred.

“Hi,” he replied, and for a moment they only looked at each other, like people checking a mirror.

Then Renu surprised him. “Tell me something no one knows about you, RJ.”

He swallowed. He had always been the one to offer plans and facts — timetables, budgets, future maps. But tonight he felt the urge to be small, to be soft.

“Dadi used to wake me up at five,” he began, voice faltering slightly with memory. “She would make me sit under the peepal and teach me a prayer. I used to hate waking up — but she’d make chai and we’d share it and she’d tell me stories of people who kept their word. I promised myself that I wouldn’t be the kind of man who forgets promises.”

Renu’s eyes softened. “You still keep that promise, isn’t it?”

He laughed quietly. “Mostly. But there is more. When I was ten, I had to help in the shop. I used to close the shutters, count the cash, and sleep on the floor sometimes. My friends played cricket; I learned ledgers. I remember missing birthdays… missing simple things. It felt like my childhood was divided between weight and work.”

Her face reflected a pain he recognized. “I thought you were always so calm. I never guessed the ledger came so early.”

He looked down, then back at her. “And when Dada taught me chess, he said always think four moves ahead. I think sometimes that made me plan my feelings too. I try not to be impulsive with love. I try to protect it like a fragile thing.”

Renu’s thumb traced the rim of her cup. “You sound like a man who carries a family on his shoulders.” Her voice broke a little. “It hurts, RJ. I see the way you pause before you promise. I know it’s because you want to keep it.”

He felt her hand, though only through pixels. “What about you?” he asked. “You told me once you grew up fast. I want to know the rest.”

She took a breath and the room shifted. “When Papa died… I was twenty-two. One day he was the man who taught me to cross the road, who made chai and teased us for being lazy. The next day, he was gone. Mum sank. We packed and moved back to Jaipur. I started working in small offices, then bigger ones, then the financial place where I learned to move money and people.” She smiled, but the smile had an edge. “At night, I would lock the door and cry. Next morning, I’d put my face on and walk to work. I learned to be strong because they needed me.”

He listened with reverence. “That’s heavy,” he whispered.

She shrugged as if it were a coat. “Everyone carries something. Mine was simply handed earlier than yours.”

They traded stories then, one by one, like old friends passing bowls. Rakesh talked about the first time he felt proud — when he had helped his elder sister get married, when he’d counted every rupee and still managed to smile.

Renu told him about lying to a landlord to buy time, about the guilt and the secret relief when the landlord agreed.

They laughed at small things, argued gently about coffee vs. chai, and then drifted into silence. The kind of silence that is not empty but full — full of understanding and the weight of shared confidences.

After a long pause, Renu said, “Do you ever fear… that we will break?”

Rakesh’s hand hovered near the camera, as if he could touch her. “Sometimes. But fear is different from caution.” He looked straight at her. “I don’t want to break you with my plans, and I don’t want to be broken by sudden choices. Can we promise something?”

Her eyes lit. “Tell me.”

He took a breath, the kind one takes before a vow. “Promise me this — that if one day you feel alone, you’ll tell me honestly. Don’t pull away. And if I ever become too guarded, tell me to open. Let us be blunt in what matters — honest with care.”

Renu's chest tightened. She felt the gravity of the moment. She touched the screen as if placing her palm on his. "I promise. And I promise, RJ, I will not leave you without speaking. I will try my best. And I promise to be your light when you are tired of planning."

They both smiled, a little wet-eyed, a little relieved. In that compact, imperfect vow, they sealed more than a word. They sealed intent — the fragile scaffold that holds love if both sides choose to lean.

For the next hour they spoke about trivialities that felt sacred: what songs they'd sing at their wedding one day, if they would name their children something old-fashioned, which part of the world they'd travel to first. Their voices were soft, stitched with the rawness of their confessions.

Before they ended the call, Renu whispered something he could hold onto forever.

"RJ," she murmured, "If ever our timing is wrong, then maybe we wait. But know this — my heart is not a temporary guest. It is a lamp. It will keep burning. Even if

you turn away for some time, it will be lit when you return."

He swallowed, words heavy and honest. "And mine will be a path back to you — even if it takes four moves to reach home."

They said goodnight with a long silence, two small prayers said in different cities. The glow of the screens went out, but the warmth they left in each other stayed — folded like a soft blanket around both their lives.

A few weeks later, on a quiet Sunday, Rakesh attended an Indian cultural gathering in Singapore.

There, he met a group of older expats discussing marriage, family, and adjustment.

One of them said casually, "Abroad life looks fancy, but women get lonely here. Not everyone can handle it."

The comment lingered like smoke.

That night, he couldn’t stop thinking about whether Renu, with her spark and energy, could really feel happy in this silent, ordered city.

He wrote to her again, carefully:

“I’m just thinking ahead, Renu.

Will you be okay moving here?

It’s quiet, disciplined — not much colour like back home.”

She replied, half serious, half playful:

“Colour main laa doongi. Don’t worry.

But if your mom expects me to live there instead, I’ll manage that too — at least for some time.”

That line — “for some time” — echoed in his mind longer than it should have.

Rakesh’s mother, meanwhile, often called him.

She would sound affectionate but weary.

“Beta, sab log pooch rahe hain shaadi ki date kab hai. Par main bas yahi sochti hoon, tumne itni jaldi kaise faisla le liya.”

He would reassure her, “Maa, she’s good. You’ll like her more when you know her better.”

But deep inside, he could feel the subtle friction between his love and her worry.

Still, he tried to focus on Renu — to prove his love by being patient, understanding, and loyal.

He even sent her expensive gifts online — a perfume, a saree, and one day, a new mobile phone.

She laughed over the call, “You’re spoiling me!”

“Bas ek khushi dene ka mann tha,” he said softly.

That night, he wrote another diary line:

“Love isn’t about possession; it’s about presence.

But how do you stay present from miles away?”

Their calls now had both laughter and pauses.

They discussed plans for the future, but the dreams didn’t align perfectly anymore.

Renu, bold as ever, wanted to move fast.

“Why wait for everything to be perfect? Let’s just marry and figure out life together.”

Rakesh hesitated.

“Life isn’t about impulse, Renu. We need time, stability, blessings.”

She rolled her eyes, “You sound like a priest sometimes.”

He smiled, “And you sound like the wind — always moving.”

That night, after their call ended, he sat by the window, looking at the broken Ganesh idol still wrapped in its cloth.

He took it out and placed it on his palm.

The two pieces fit perfectly, yet would never fuse again.

He whispered, “Maybe love is like this — perfect only in memory.”

3M

The next day, his phone beeped with a short message from her:

“Let’s talk less for a few days. I need some space.”

He stared at it for a long time, feeling as if someone had switched off the sun.

3M

💛 End of Chapter – The Attempt to Prove Love

Chapter 7 – The Silence

Silence arrived like a fog — slowly, without an obvious sound, but thick enough to dim everything familiar.

At first it was small: a missed call, a late reply, an email that took hours. Rakesh told himself it was work, deadlines, the rhythm of expatriate life. But when hours became days, worry crept in. Then came that terrible, hollow feeling — as if a room had had its lights switched off and he didn't know which switch to flip.

He began with polite calls. One, two, three. The phone rang in empty air. After the third day, he rang her home number. Her mother picked up, voice calm, almost rehearsed.

"Hello, beta," she said.

"Ma'am," Rakesh managed, "Renu ji theek hai na? Main bas check kar raha tha."

“Haan, beta. Kaam chal raha hai. Thodi busy hai.” The voice put a soft blanket over the worry but did not remove it.

Rakesh called again and again — in office breaks, in taxi rides, at night on hotel Wi-Fi. Each unanswered ring created a small earthquake inside him. He slept badly, woke early, stared at the phone screen like one watches a door hoping someone will return.

On the fifth day, a message finally came. Short. Distant.

“Rakesh, mujhe kuch waqt chahiye. Main thoda confuse hoon. Please samajh jao.”

The words were civil — but they landed like cold rain.

He wrote back a long message, then deleted it, then composed another. He tried to be calm, measured, kind. He tried to offer reassurance and space simultaneously — an impossible balance.

“I understand,” he typed finally. “Take your time. I’ll wait.”

Waiting, however, was not a passive action. It was a slow, daily erosion. He began to notice how the small things in life that used to belong to them — the song they both liked, a meme, a voice note — now felt like relics of a former country. He replayed their old calls, memorised the cadence of her laughter, clung to fragments as if they were lifelines.

Work suffered. He missed deadlines. His boss called him in, gently asking if everything was okay. Rakesh nodded and lied a little: “Yes, just a family thing.” In truth, he carried the gloom into meetings, his words thin and distracted. Colleagues saw him for a puzzled stranger who used to be reliable.

It got worse. Weeks passed. The silence widened its reach. Rumours and worry started at home. His mother watched him with soft concern, trying to bridge the distance with homemade comforts—her voice on the line, packets of his favourite chutney shipped to Singapore, and prayers whispered at morning time. She would say over the phone, “Beta, sab theek ho jayega. Tu dhairya rakh.” He would smile and say, “Haan maa,” but inside the patience was cracking.

He started to drink — once a week, then twice — not to get drunk, but to blur the edges of the ache for a few hours. Nights began to blend. He watched movies alone in dim lounges; lines from dialogues became his temporary mantras. In a film one night a simple line struck him like a bell:

“Agar pyaar jaanaa chahe to use jaane do; agar woh waapis aae to woh tumhara hai, warna woh kabhi tumhara tha hi nahin.”

The sentence felt like a verdict and a prayer at once. He repeated it in his mind until it stopped hurting so sharply. Then, in the quiet hours before dawn, he found himself opening spiritual talks on YouTube — a monk’s voice filling the empty spaces with other voices that seemed to have answers.

One talk, in particular, caught him: a stern but compassionate man spoke about duties, dharma, and the place of family in a man’s life. He quoted an ancient text about relationships that challenged modern sensibilities: that a woman who drags a man away from his responsibilities and rituals could be examined carefully. The talk was harsh and not entirely fair — yet to a hurting

heart, any moral clarity can seem like a rope thrown across a river.

Rakesh didn't use the talk as a weapon against Renu, but he tucked it into his thoughts like a lens. He began to analyze not only her actions but his own reactions. He questioned whether the slow pace he sought was actually his fear. He wrote in his diary:

"Kya main sahi hoon? Kya main galat hoon? Kya pyaar ka matlab alag alag hota hai? Agar woh ab doori chahti hai, to kya main usse rok sakta hoon?"

Days bled into weeks. Then suddenly, as if a decision had been made in the silence, Renu answered his calls — for a brief, brittle conversation. She said she felt something was off, that long-distance had shown them different versions of life and she needed to rethink what she wanted. She apologized for hurting him but didn't promise anything. Her voice was steady but not warm. When she said, "I need to think about my future," the phrase felt like a legal sentence.

After the call, he sat in the dark and let the silence sweep him completely. He tried to call her mother, to ask gently if

she could help understand what had shifted. But one moment the line would be polite, the next, curt. He felt both deserted and cornered by circumstances.

Then came the first public rumour — whispers at family gatherings that their engagement might be in trouble. His relatives in India called him with veiled questions. “Kya hua beta? Koi problem to nahi?” His answer was always vague: “Subah theek ho jayega.” He learned to speak small words to hide a big heart.

Life, in its practical sense, moved forward. Rakesh went to work. He paid his bills. He played with his daughter in the small apartment when he could. But emotionally, he was in a limbo — a man waiting at an empty station.

And then one morning, an abrupt message arrived: Renu’s mother had taken a vow — “hum kabhi nahi milenge” — and she requested that their families end the engagement. The sacred rituals that once bound them now became the basis for a divide. It was final, not negotiable. In one moment, the silence turned into a wall.

Rakesh read the message three times. The last time he felt an odd relief and an awful loneliness at the same time.

Relief because something definitive had arrived; loneliness because the definitive answer was loss. He tried to call her, but the phone went to voicemail. He left messages — long, pleading, quiet — each one a small paper boat sent into a river that had closed its banks.

His friends told him to move on. “She’s not worth losing sleep over,” they said with blunt kindness. “There are other prospects, beta.” They did not understand that he hadn’t lost a person — he had lost a map to himself.

Over the next months, Rakesh oscillated. He would be calm for days, then suddenly overwhelmed. Sometimes he would go to the temple and pray with sincere devotion. Other times he’d sit in his studio, flipping through their old messages, the ones where she had used a silly heart emoji or sent a picture from the market.

Each memory lived like a small festival in his mind — bright and fleeting — and then the emptiness returned.

Yet, beneath the fog, something else was growing. Quietly, slowly, like a seed pushing through soil: an understanding that life might have other lessons for him, that love had not vanished but transformed its teachings. It would take

him years to fully see that — but in those painful, lonely months, the first roots of acceptance formed.

🔚

💛 End of Chapter – The Silence

Chapter 8 – The Turning Point

After weeks of uncertainty, Rakesh decided to bury himself in work.

He told himself that focus could fix what feelings couldn't.

But even work felt hollow now.

He had begun to live like a man walking on autopilot — doing, but not being.

The colleagues who once admired his calmness now saw tired eyes, late arrivals, and quiet lunches.

He wasn't angry, only absent.

Then, one evening, his phone rang. It was his sister from India.

Her voice was trembling.

"Bhaiya… papa is not well."

Rakesh froze.

"What happened?"

“Suddenly he couldn’t speak properly,” she said. “We thought it was weakness, but doctor ne kaha mild stroke hai. We’re taking him to Jaipur for treatment.”

He sat back, numb.

His father — the strong man who had raised him with words like discipline and control — was now fragile, uncertain, and far away.

3M

That night, he barely slept.

He kept thinking — I should go home. I should be there.

But the guilt of unfinished office projects, pending visa paperwork, and his mother’s pride all tangled around him like chains.

The next morning, he spoke to his manager and booked a flight.

Within 48 hours, he was back in India.

The sight of his father, lying weak but smiling faintly, broke something inside him.

The man who once taught him courage was now fighting his own body to stay strong.

His mother, trying to look brave, wiped her tears quietly whenever someone entered the room.

“Beta,” his father whispered, “sab theek ho jayega.”

Rakesh nodded, holding his hand. “Bas jaldi theek ho jao, papa.”

3M

Days passed in hospital corridors.

Between medicines, reports, and long silences, he learned the shape of helplessness.

During those tense days, one unexpected name appeared — Renu.

She had heard from someone in the extended family about his father's condition.

Without hesitation, she visited the hospital in Jaipur, carrying home-cooked food for his mother and a soft-spoken reassurance that things would be alright.

When Rakesh arrived that evening, his mother said softly, "Renu aayi thi. Bahut samajhdaar ladki hai."

He paused — a small warmth flickered in his chest.

She came? Even after the silence, after everything?

The next day, he saw her in the corridor.

Their eyes met.

For a second, time lost meaning.

"Hi," she said gently. "I just wanted to check if Uncle is better."

"He is… a little," he managed.

"Take care," she said. "Don't overthink everything, okay?"

Before he could say anything more, her mother appeared at the other end of the corridor.

Renu turned, nodded politely, and walked away.

That brief moment — short, awkward, filled with unsaid love — would be the last time they spoke peacefully.

3M

When the treatment ended and Rakesh's father returned home, there was an uneasy calm.

Renu's visit, which had seemed like compassion, became a subject of whispered criticism.

Relatives murmured, "Ladki bahut aati-jati rehti hai, achha nahi lagta."

His mother, though grateful, grew more defensive and distant.

Rakesh sensed the shift but didn't confront it.

He thought silence was maturity; he didn't realize silence could also be surrender.

One evening, while sorting through his father's medicines, he noticed unfamiliar pills.

He Googled the names — neurological medication, antidepressants.

His heart sank.

He asked his sister quietly, "Papa kabse yeh le rahe hain?"

She hesitated. "Bhaiya, a lot happened when you were away. We didn't tell you because we didn't want to disturb you."

"What do you mean?"

She told him everything — the near-paralysis, the rushed trip to Jaipur, how Renu had helped manage things, and how after just two days back home, tension arose between Renu and their mother.

Something small had gone wrong — perhaps a tone, a misunderstanding — but it grew quickly into a wall of pride and hurt.

Rakesh listened in silence.

When she finished, he whispered, “Aur ma ne kuch kaha?”

“She didn’t like that Renu stayed so close. She said, ‘hamara beta to bas uske bas mein aa gaya.’”

3M

That night, Rakesh sat by the window, staring at the city lights.

He was torn between two loves — one that raised him, and one that awakened him.

He tried calling Renu, but her phone went unanswered.

He wrote a message:

“I know things got strange. I wish I could fix them. But I’m stuck — between what I want and what I owe. I don’t want to hurt anyone, least of all you.”

There was no reply.

When Duty and Love Collide

Rakesh arrived home with a suitcase full of promises and a head full of careful plans.

He had seen Renu, performed the roka, met relatives, and felt the sweet weight of commitment.

He should have returned to Singapore with a gentle certainty that life was moving forward — two people, two families, one unfolding promise.

Instead, the house felt different. A hush lived in the rooms where laughter used to sit. His mother greeted him with a smile that didn't reach her eyes. His sister hugged him tightly and then hurried away with errands. The usual warmth was there — but it had an edge, as if everyone was walking on a floor that might crack.

That evening, he sat with his father in the small courtyard under the dim bulb, sipping weak tea.

His father's voice was softer, slower. "Beta, kuch din se thakan si lag rahi hai."

Rakesh's heart tightened. He watched the hands of the man who taught him balance tremble slightly as he lifted the cup.

When his sister later pulled him aside and spoke in hurried whispers, the words fell like heavy stones.

“Bhaiya… papa ka haal theek nahi. Doctor ne kaha kuch neurologic signs dekhe hain. Humne Jaipur bhi try kiya… acchi doctor mil gayi. Treatment chal raha hai.” Her eyes were wet but fierce. “Tumhe bata nahi rahe the kyunki tum busy ho. Lekin ab sab upar neeche hai.”

Rakesh felt the floor shift under him. Questions crowded his mind, but his sister kept talking, explaining the timelines, the hospital visits, the bills. He could see the arithmetic forming — the way money and care lined up against illness.

That night, at the hospital, between the beeps of machines and the smell of antiseptic, a figure appeared — Renu.

She stepped into the corridor with a bag of warm food, a discreet smile, and eyes that held concern not just for the patient but for the family. She walked straight to his mother and offered help without fuss. She arranged cushions, made calls, and sat beside the bed with quiet competence.

For a brief moment, Rakesh felt a surge of gratitude so fierce it made his chest ache. She had crossed distances and silence to be there — to help his family at their most vulnerable. He thought: if ever there was proof of love, this was it.

Then the undercurrent began. Whispers at the edge of the room. Aunties exchanging glances. The way his mother's voice became clipped when Renu offered to cook extra.

"She theek hai, beta. Aap ghar ja ke rest karo," his mother murmured to Renu once, though she had not needed coaxing to accept help from others. The tone was polite but guarded — as if she feared being judged for being too warm toward someone whom the family had hardly known.

Renu noticed it too. In her eyes flickered a quiet hurt, but she continued to help. She spoke softly with his sister, made calls to coordinate a follow-up appointment in Jaipur, and even accompanied them on the urgent trip. For those days she was steady, tireless, practical — everything a family would hope for a daughter-in-law to be.

Yet, when they returned home, rumours had already begun to grow sharper. In the corners of relatives' conversations there were questions: Why had she been "so involved" in only a few days? Was she trying to position herself? Did she overstep the line? People whispered about propriety and pace, about how a young woman's involvement could unsettle older sensibilities.

One evening, his Buaji — who had always been outspoken and practical in her suggestions — took him aside with the kind of firmness that had once guided marriages in the family for generations. She tightened her sari at the shoulder and said plainly:

"Bhaiya, aisa ho raha hai ki tumhara dhyan ab ghar pe hoga. Papa ka ilaaj aur kharcha sab tumhein manage karna padega. Ab in sab baaton ko dekhte hue — shaadi kar do. Ladki ko le aao ghar pe; phir tum jaa ke bahar kamai kar lena. Yeh purani parampara hi sahi hai. Pehle ghar banao phir duniya jito."

Rakesh looked at her, feeling the weight of generations in one sentence.

“Bua ji,” he replied, trying to be calm, “aise decisions bina soch ke nahi lene chahiye. Agar main shaadi kar loon aur phir turant pardes chala jaun, who ladki ghar sambhalegi — lekin kya main usse chhod kar jaa sakta hoon? Kya main use caretaker samajh kar shaadi karoonga?”

Her face hardened, not unkind but resolute. “Beta, zamana alag ho gaya hai. Par duty wahi duty hai. Agar ghar ko sambhalna hai to pehle ghar ki suvidha ka vichar hona chahiye. Tum bahut zimmedar ho. Main bol rahi hoon, pehle ghar ko secure karo phir bahar jao.”

He felt constricted. It sounded practical — logical even — but it felt like a small betrayal to the promise he and Renu had made in the dark of the theatre, the song still echoing. He tried to explain — about the plans, the timing, the need to be worthy of respect before he promised stability — but Buaji dismissed it as modern complexity.

“Tum time le rahe ho jab waqt abhi hai,” she admonished. “Log talk karenge. Agar tum aaj shaadi nahi karoge, kal koi aur chance le lega. Aur ghar mein sapne bade nahi hote, beta; practical solutions chahiye.”

Rakesh's chest tightened. He thought of Renu's smiling assurance, her insistence that they could marry and grow together. He thought of his own Dadi's voice advising patience and steadiness. Now the chorus split: one voice whispered growth through careful planning; another demanded immediate shelter and traditional repair.

Underneath it, a deeper, quieter fear began to throb. What if his insistence on waiting sounded like hesitation to Renu? What if Buaji's "practical" plan sounded to others like an instruction — a routemap that went straight through Renu's autonomy? He felt angled from both sides: pulled toward a duty he could not refuse and toward a love he had cherished.

He tried to call Renu. The phone rang. Once. Twice. Then to voicemail. He put the handset down only to pick it up again. A strange anger — not at anyone in particular — rose in him. Why was everything now suddenly riddled with expectation? Why did help become politics?

In the days that followed, misunderstandings crept quietly into messages. Short replies. Delays. Then a pause. He learned later that in a household where fear and pride had a louder voice than gratitude, Renu's gestures, however genuine, could be misunderstood or misread as over-

familiar. A cousin's muttered observation became a line crossed in someone's mind. A small comment about scheduling turned into a reflection on "who respects whom" — an old script that never dies easily.

Rakesh found himself in an impossible middle — trying to hold both worlds together. He wanted to stand by his mother, to do his duty, to ensure his father got the best care. He also wanted to protect the fragile, generous heart that had come for him in a corridor and given without asking. His words failed. His silence multiplied.

Finally, after a month of strained courtesies and unanswered calls, a call came — short, the voice steady, but like a final closed door.

"Rakesh," Renu said, "this is our last conversation. Maa ne kasam li hai. She says we will never meet; she says it's better for all of us."

He felt the ground give way.

“Renu,” he whispered, voice cracking, “please — is there nothing we can do? I can talk to her. I can explain. I will do anything.”

Her reply was cold with the weight of a vow. “Maa has decided. I cannot. I’m sorry.”

The line ended with the faint click of finality.

Rakesh sat alone in the dark hospital corridor. The machines beeped on, indifferent. He closed his eyes and for the first time heard the chessboard advice of his grandfather collide with the loud, worldly rules of relatives: sometimes, no four moves can predict what pride and fear will do.

He returned to Singapore with his suitcase heavier, his heart heavier. Duty was not simply arithmetic; it was an emotional ledger no machine could balance. And love — even the deepest — sometimes bows before vows older and louder than itself.

A week later, he returned to Singapore.

He left behind gifts, letters, and the wrapped box of roka memories at home.

He couldn't carry them; they felt too heavy for his suitcase and too sacred for disposal.

Back abroad, rumours began to swirl — quiet but cruel.

Some relatives whispered that Rakesh had changed, that success made him cold.

Others hinted that Renu had become distant, disobedient.

One family acquaintance even said bluntly, "Maybe the girl got another proposal."

Another said, "Beta foreign gaya hai, ab maa ke saath koi ladki adjust nahi karegi."

Each comment cut a little deeper.

Rakesh avoided gatherings, preferring solitude.

He thought constantly of calling Renu, of clearing the fog — but every time he tried, fear stopped him.

What if she didn’t answer?

What if she did, and he heard finality in her voice?

He started writing long unsent letters again — half prayer, half confession.

“I wish people understood that love is not rebellion.

It is devotion, just in another language.”

3M

Weeks turned into months.

Then, one evening, his phone buzzed with an international call from India.

He answered instantly.

It was her.

Her voice trembled but carried firmness.

“Rakesh… this is our last conversation.”

He didn’t speak. He couldn’t.

“My mother has taken a vow,” she continued. “She said we will never see each other again. And I… I can’t go against her.”

Silence on the line — long, unbearable, final.

Finally, he said quietly, “If that’s her vow, then I’ll respect it. But remember, vows are of this life. Love isn’t.”

The line clicked.

The call ended.

That was the day Rakesh stopped calling, stopped writing, stopped explaining.

Instead, he turned inward — to meditation, to mantras, to stillness.

He told himself this wasn’t the end, just an intermission written by destiny.

“Jo likha hai, wo poora hoga.

Bas samay ka intezaar hai.”

💛 End of Chapter – The Turning Point

Chapter 9 – The Aftermath

The morning after the final call felt unreal.

Rakesh woke up before dawn, expecting the usual ping of her message — “Good morning, Mr Timetable.”

Instead, there was only the low hum of the refrigerator and the dull ache behind his eyes.

He sat at the window for hours, watching the sky turn from grey to gold, the city coming alive without him.

It was strange how the world never paused for heartbreak.

For weeks he lived like a ghost in his own flat.

Eat. Work. Pretend. Repeat.

He’d stare at the phone for hours, half-expecting a miracle ring that never came.

At work, he smiled when spoken to, but his colleagues began to notice the hollowness behind it.

The man who once corrected everyone’s spreadsheets now forgot his own presentations.

His boss asked if he needed a vacation; Rakesh simply said, “Maybe later.”

That night, “later” arrived in the form of a colleague named Arjun — new to the company, full of restless laughter.

Arjun invited him out: “Yaar, you look like you need a break. Come, I’ll show you how Singapore parties.”

Rakesh resisted. Then agreed.

The first escape

It was his first time inside a club.

Music pounded, lights flickered, strangers danced as if the world owed them joy.

Arjun handed him a drink.

“Just try once. Won’t kill you.”

The liquid burned, then loosened something tight inside him.

He didn’t dance, but he didn’t leave either.

He sat in a corner, half-listening, half-remembering — the way Renu would have teased him for even being here.

He smiled to himself: She’d call this my rebellion phase.

The night ended late. When he reached home, he looked in the mirror and said softly,

“So this is what forgetting feels like — noisy from outside, empty within.”

For the next few weeks, he kept going out with Arjun’s group.

Movies, street food, late-night drives.

He didn’t find happiness, but at least he found distraction.

People tried to cheer him up with advice — “Move on,” “Find someone else,” “Life goes on.”

He nodded, pretending to believe them.

The voice of truth

One Sunday morning, hung-over and exhausted, he opened YouTube searching for “Indian spiritual talk.”

A thumbnail appeared — an old monk, eyes calm, voice steady.

He clicked.

“When you lose something precious,” the monk said, “don’t ask why me? Ask what now?

Pain is not punishment; it is purification.”

Rakesh paused the video, stared at the wall.

He replayed the line again and again until it etched itself into his mind.

He folded his hands before the tiny brass Hanuman idol on his table — the one still standing beside the broken glass Ganesh in his drawer.

He whispered,

“If this is purification, then give me strength to survive it.”

That day he decided to stop alcohol, stop clubs, stop running.

He would face the silence instead of drowning it.

For the first time in years, Rakesh felt truly hollow.

Renu's sudden silence—one day, then two, then five—was like a curtain falling over his world.

He checked his phone dozens of times a day,

re-read their messages,

called her repeatedly,

even dialled her mother's landline in desperation.

No response.

Not a word.

Not a sign.

The boy who had always handled life with logic and discipline suddenly felt like a stranger inside his own skin.

A Visit to the Homoeopathy Clinic

One evening, unable to bear the tightness in his chest, he walked into a small homoeopathy clinic near his Singapore apartment.

The elderly doctor looked at him for a long moment and said gently:

“Young man, yeh heart pain dawa se nahi theek hota.

Dil ka dard… dil hi se theek hota hai.”

Rakesh lowered his eyes.

He knew the doctor was right.

But medicines felt easier than waiting.

He still bought a small vial of pills—hope sometimes comes in small bottles, even if empty.

Nights of Wandering

A week had passed since Renu disappeared.

He could no longer sit alone in his room.

One night, he remembered a colleague who had once dragged him to a club “just for fun.”

At that time, Rakesh had resisted.

But now, with nothing left to lose, he stepped into Singapore’s neon nights alone.

The club was loud, colourful, overflowing with strangers.

He sat at the bar quietly, watching people dance, laugh, flirt—living lives untouched by the pain he carried.

Soon enough, he found himself in unexpected conversations with people from around the world.

3M

Love Through Foreign Eyes

One evening, an American man, slightly tipsy but very friendly, sat next to him.

“You look like you’re thinking too much,” he said.

Rakesh smiled sadly. “Maybe.”

The man shared his own story—

a passionate one-year relationship that ended in a simple, mutual goodbye.

“No drama,” he said, “no trauma.

We loved.

It faded.

We moved on.

Love isn’t supposed to break you, man.”

Rakesh listened quietly.

How could love be so simple for some and so shattering for others?

Another night, a German fellow told him about his childhood sweetheart.

“We live in different countries,” he said proudly,

“but we stay connected.

Distance doesn’t matter when the heart chooses certainty.”

These stories confused Rakesh further.

There seemed to be no universal definition of love—

only personal ones.

But every story, happy or sad, reminded him of Renu.

And every reminder hurt.

3M

The Search for Answers

In a moment of helplessness, Rakesh did something he had never imagined—

he gathered the courage to reach out to Renu’s elder sister in Australia.

He found her contact through an old group chat.

His hand trembled as he typed.

“Didi… hope you remember me.

I wanted to ask… is Renu okay?”

She replied after a pause,

“Don’t worry, Rakesh.

She doesn’t talk every day.

Sometimes ten days bhi beet jaate hain.

She’s like that.

She’ll call when she feels like it.”

He felt relief… and confusion.

Was he overreacting?

Was this normal for her?

Why was he the only one breaking apart?

Still, he asked one more question—one that came straight from his heart:

“Didi… what does Renu like the most?

Anything I should know?”

Her reply came with a teasing laugh:

“Oh-ho!

You want to impress her more, hmm?

Simple.

Renu loves words.

Write something for her.

Write a poem.

She’ll melt.”

Something stirred inside him,

like a soft flame relighting in cold ashes.

The Birth of the Poem

That night, he sat at his desk with trembling hands.

The room was silent.

The window slightly open.

The night air heavy with memories.

He stared at the blank screen.

His heart whispered lines that had been waiting centuries to escape.

Slowly, he began typing—

“Ek kavita likh raha hoon main apni jaan ke liye,

Wo jo jeene ka maksad hai aur armaan bhi mera…”

Words flowed like tears—beautiful, uncontrollable, true.

He wasn’t writing a poem.

He was writing a confession.

A heartbeat.

A prayer.

A pain.

A promise.

And when he finished, he felt lighter…

as if the poem had held the sorrow he couldn’t carry anymore.

The return of faith

He began waking at 5 a.m. again.

He chanted Hanuman Chalisa — haltingly at first, then fluently.

He wrote in his journal:

“Faith is like breath; even when you forget it, it keeps you alive.”

Slowly, his days found rhythm. Work improved; sleep returned.

He started visiting a small temple near his office on Fridays.

The priest there, an elderly Tamil man, once asked, “You pray for success?”

Rakesh smiled faintly. “I pray for understanding.”

He wasn’t sure what that meant, but saying it felt right.

3M

The lingering ache

Still, love has its own ghost hours.

Some nights he’d dream that his phone rang, see her name flashing — Renu Calling…

He’d wake with a start, heart racing, hands trembling.

Every time, the screen would be blank.

His flat was filled with reminders he couldn’t throw away: her gifted keychain, her laughter saved in an old voicemail, the perfume she liked lingering faintly on a scarf.

He considered deleting everything — but didn’t.

Not yet.

Instead, he began writing letters again — not to send, but to understand.

Each began with “Dear Renu,” and ended with a lesson.

“Love didn’t fail us. Timing did.”

“Maybe separation is also a form of care — the universe saving us from hurting each other more.”

One night, he added another line:

“If souls remember, then ours will meet again.”

He didn’t know it yet, but that belief — small, quiet, unshakeable — would shape the rest of his life.

💛 End of Chapter – The Aftermath

Chapter 10 – The Awakening

Time moved gently after that — like a river that had stopped roaring but never really stilled.

Rakesh was no longer the same man.

The one who once feared missing a call now feared missing his morning meditation.

His days had softened.

He worked with focus, spoke less, smiled often, and spent his evenings walking along the river near Clarke Quay, watching the lights ripple like liquid stars.

He had stopped searching for meaning in people and started finding it in patterns — numbers, chants, silences.

Some evenings he'd sit by the water and whisper to himself,

"Everything changes form, but nothing ends. Even love."

The shift within

It began simply — a book recommendation from a colleague, “Autobiography of a Yogi.”

He read it like a thirsty man drinks water.

Every line about meditation, karma, and soul resonance felt personal.

He underlined one passage:

“True love is not possession but expansion.

When you love purely, you become vast enough to hold even loss.”

He closed the book and whispered, “So that’s what this is — expansion.”

From then on, he began meditating seriously.

He learned pranayama, began attending Sunday sessions at the Indian Association, and later studied numerology as a way to decode cosmic order.

Numbers, he realized, were not math — they were vibrations.

He calculated his and Renu's birth numbers one evening — they added up to a "9" and a "6."

Opposite but harmonious, fire and water.

He smiled: Even our equations were trying to tell us something.

3M

The reappearance of signs

When the universe begins to heal you, it first sends reminders.

One rainy morning, while leaving for work, he noticed a small glass figurine being sold by a street vendor — identical to the Ganesh idol that had broken years ago.

He stopped.

It was the same soft green hue, the same gentle tilt of the head.

He bought it, placed it on his desk, and stared at it for a long time.

That night, he dreamt of Renu.

She wasn't speaking — just standing by a window, smiling peacefully.

When he woke, the clock showed 5:55 — a triple number, a numerological sign of change.

He noted it down: "Some connections never end; they only change their language."

3M

The teacher within

Over time, colleagues began noticing his calmness.

"Rakesh, you meditate, right? You look so peaceful now."

He'd smile, "Peace isn't a gift. It's a practice."

He started mentoring younger teammates — teaching them patience, emotional balance, the importance of detachment in a material world.

He realized he wasn't teaching them corporate lessons; he was teaching himself closure.

At home, he still kept the drawer with the broken idol, untouched.

He never repaired it.

It was a quiet metaphor — that some things are more beautiful acknowledged in imperfection.

3M

A message from the universe

On his next visit to India, Rakesh's mother met him at the door with teary eyes and trembling hands.

She hugged him tighter than usual.

"Beta," she said, "I'm proud of you. You didn't let sorrow make you bitter."

He smiled faintly, "Aapka sanskar hai, Maa."

That night, while helping her arrange some old drawers, he found a faded envelope.

It was addressed to him in Renu's handwriting — unopened.

His heart skipped a beat.

He opened it slowly. Inside was a simple handwritten note.

“Rakesh,

Life may take us far, but I will always respect what we shared.

Please take care of your parents. You have a rare heart.

I’ll pray that it always stays kind.

— R.”

He read it several times, then folded it neatly and placed it beside the idol in his drawer.

It was not closure, but it was peace.

The beginning of purpose

Rakesh’s meditation practice deepened further.

He started teaching basic breathing and mantra techniques to others after work.

It wasn’t planned — people simply started asking, and he simply started sharing.

He never spoke of Renu again, but when he guided others about letting go, there was a tenderness in his voice that came only from lived truth.

He used to say,

“Love is not about keeping someone; it’s about keeping their goodness alive in you.”

He no longer prayed for her return.

He prayed that wherever she was, she’d be at peace.

One evening, while meditating, he saw a flash of light behind his closed eyes — a vision, or maybe just imagination — of two souls meeting in the distance, smiling before parting again.

He didn’t question it.

He just smiled and whispered,

“So be it, Universe.”

Rebirth of self

Years passed.

Rakesh became known in small circles as “the silent achiever” — a man who spoke little but radiated calm.

He took up volunteering at an ashram during weekends, helping underprivileged children learn meditation and focus.

People often asked why he gave so much time to others.

He’d reply softly, “Because love needs somewhere to go.”

And in that single sentence lay the summary of everything he had learned.

He had finally realized that letting go is not the end of love — it’s the graduation of love.

💛 End of Chapter – The Awakening

Chapter 11 – Time's Quiet Hands

Time didn't heal Rakesh — it reshaped him.

It smoothed the sharpness of pain, dulled the daily ache, but it never erased the imprint of love.

It was as if someone had written her name softly across his existence — not in ink, but in breath.

He had stopped checking her online presence long ago.

No more late-night scrolls, no more old messages.

And yet, every morning at 9:00 a.m., when he stepped out after his prayers, a soft breeze brushed his face — gentle, cool, unmistakably familiar.

He smiled every time.

"Good morning, Renu," he'd whisper unconsciously, as if his soul still remembered a ritual his mind had forgotten.

The invisible thread

Across the ocean, in another city, Renu would sit after breakfast and begin her daily Reiki session.

Eyes closed, palms open, breathing steady — she would feel the same breeze touch her skin.

Sometimes she'd smile for no reason.

Her mother once asked, "Kis baat pe muskura rahi ho?"

She replied, "Bas, aise hi… hawa achhi lag rahi hai."

But in her heart she knew — somewhere, someone was remembering her.

That's the mystery of energy.

When love is true, it doesn't vanish; it vibrates — quietly, constantly — between two souls who once recognized each other.

3M

Ordinary life, extraordinary memory

Rakesh now lived a balanced life.

Work, yoga, friends, charity — he filled his days meaningfully.

He even laughed again — genuinely, not politely.

And yet, there were moments when the universe nudged him gently — like tiny winks from destiny.

A familiar song in a taxi.

A café named “Renu’s Delight.”

A phone number ending in the same digits as hers.

He noticed, smiled, and whispered, “I see you, Universe.”

It wasn’t longing anymore.

It was gratitude — for having known love so pure that even separation couldn’t corrupt it.

The memory trigger

One Sunday morning, while cleaning the house, his daughter found an old phone.

“Papa, can I play with this? It doesn’t work!” she said, holding up the small, dusty device.

He looked at it — frozen.

It was the same phone he had once gifted Renu years ago, the one that somehow found its way back during the exchange of belongings after the broken engagement.

His throat tightened.

He took it gently from her hands, staring at the scratches on the back panel.

He whispered, “Some things travel farther than messages.”

His wife, seeing his expression, asked lightly, “Kya hua? Purana phone hai kya?”

He smiled faintly. “Haan… purana phone hai. Bahut purani kahani ke saath.”

That night, after everyone slept, he held the phone again — not with regret, but with reverence.

He placed it beside the wrapped cloth containing the broken glass Ganesh idol.

Two relics of a love unfinished, yet undying.

3M

The universe replies

A week later, while browsing online, he stumbled upon a video of a monk explaining six forms of living energy —

Earth, Fire, Water, Air, Vegetation, and Sentient Beings.

The monk's words struck him deeply:

"Nothing truly dies.

The same energy that forms you will reappear in another form.

Every bond you create leaves an imprint in the elements — air remembers touch, water remembers emotion."

Rakesh felt his breath slow.

He thought of the morning breeze at 9:00, the calm that arrived uninvited every day.

He closed his eyes and whispered, “Toh ye yaadein hawa mein likhi gayi hain…”

3M

Reflections on destiny

He wrote that night in his journal:

“We spend life blaming time — but maybe time is innocent.

It only gives us what we’re ready for.

Maybe she wasn’t mine to keep; she was mine to awaken me.”

That line became his favorite truth.

From then on, every time the breeze touched his face, he didn’t feel the ache of distance anymore — he felt companionship, invisible but real.

He called it the breath of remembrance.

Elsewhere, at the same hour…

Renu, now settled with her own family, sat with her small daughter one afternoon, helping her draw with crayons.

The child drew a figure — a man beside a small shining object.

“What’s that?” Renu asked, smiling.

Her daughter said innocently, “Ganpati. Aur unke paas ek uncle hain jo unhe dekh rahe hain.”

Renu froze, her heart skipping a beat.

“Uncle kaun?”

“Wahi jo sapne mein aaye the!”

Renu didn’t ask more. She didn’t need to.

Later, while shopping in the market, she saw a glass Ganesh idol — exactly like the one she had once gifted Rakesh.

Her hand trembled as she picked it up.

Her daughter insisted, “Mumma, let’s take this one home!”

She smiled weakly, tears welling up.

“Okay, beta,” she said softly. “Let’s take it home.”

That evening, she placed it on their prayer shelf — beside her diya and incense sticks.

And as the flame flickered, for a brief, inexplicable moment, she felt peace — the same peace that touched Rakesh every morning thousands of miles away.

3M

The pause between lifetimes

Some connections, perhaps, are not meant to end in a single birth.

They pause — to let both souls grow before they meet again.

Rakesh had stopped expecting a reunion.

He didn’t crave her voice anymore; he conversed with her energy instead.

When he meditated, he would whisper quietly:

“If you are out there, Renu, may you be calm.

I’ve learned to smile without you, but not without what you taught me.”

And that was the truth — she had taught him not just love, but how to love: gently, unconditionally, eternally.

🏧

💛 End of Chapter – Time’s Quiet Hands

Chapter 12 – Non-Living Things Do Live

The soul has a strange way of speaking — not through words, but through symbols.

And Rakesh, by now, had learned to listen.

It began on an ordinary Thursday.

He was clearing his drawer — the same one where the old phone and the broken Ganesh idol rested.

For years, he hadn't touched them.

They sat there like two silent witnesses, holding stories he had stopped retelling.

But that day, something stirred.

When his hand brushed the glass idol, a tiny shimmer of light reflected across the room, landing on his daughter's notebook.

She giggled, "Papa, Ganpati ji is smiling!"

Rakesh froze.

The idol’s broken edge caught the sunlight at just the right angle — as if blessing her.

He smiled slowly.

Maybe she was right.

Maybe blessings don’t need to be whole; maybe they just need to shine.

3M

The six forms of life

That evening, while unwinding after work, he came across a lecture video by a revered monk.

The title read: “The Six Forms of Living Beings — Jiva in Every Form.”

He pressed play.

The monk’s words flowed like gentle truth:

“There are six types of living energies in this universe —

Earth, Fire, Water, Air, Vegetation, and the Sentient Beings.

Every element holds memory.

Every object remembers the emotion of the one who touched it."

Rakesh leaned forward, listening intently.

"The soil you walk on, the water you drink, the wind you feel — all of it has life.

That is why karma repeats; that is why rebirth happens.

The energy of love never dies — it simply finds a new vessel."

Rakesh closed his eyes.

In that instant, something within him connected.

The morning breeze that always touched him at 9 a.m., the way the old phone kept finding its way back, the Ganesh idol that never lost its sparkle — they weren't coincidences.

They were continuations.

He wrote in his journal that night:

“Even stones remember love.

Maybe that’s why memories hurt — because the air around us carries them too.”

The unexpected return

The next morning, his daughter ran to him holding a photograph —

one taken long ago, during his Singapore days.

It was a group picture from his office, but in the corner of the frame, behind a glass reflection, was a faint blur — a silhouette that looked almost like Renu.

He laughed at the impossibility of it, but then caught himself whispering, “Nice try, Universe.”

Later that day, as he stepped outside, a familiar wind brushed his face again — calm, cool, carrying that subtle fragrance of sandalwood he used to associate with her.

He smiled, looked up at the sky, and said softly, “You’re everywhere, aren’t you?”

And for a fleeting moment, he swore the air answered back — not in sound, but in peace.

Reverence in remembrance

From then on, every inanimate object became alive to him.

He no longer called them “things.”

The chair became the listener of years.

The curtain — the keeper of light.

The old phone — the vessel of a voice once loved.

He realized that the universe doesn’t forget — it merely rearranges.

Energy becomes memory, and memory becomes prayer.

One evening, sitting on his balcony, he whispered,

“Maybe that’s why love never dies — because it leaves traces in the air, in water, in glass, in us.”

3M

Echoes from afar

Across the ocean, Renu experienced her own subtle awakenings.

During her Reiki meditations, she’d sense a faint vibration near her palm — warm, pulsating, almost as if someone was sending energy from far away.

At first, she dismissed it as imagination.

But when it started happening every morning around the same hour — 9 a.m. — she smiled knowingly.

“Arey, Rakesh…” she whispered once under her breath, “tu abhi bhi hawaon mein hai kya?”

She didn’t realize that at the very same moment, Rakesh was sitting cross-legged in meditation, breathing in the same rhythm, thinking of nothing, yet feeling everything.

3M

Living through what doesn’t live

Rakesh’s understanding of spirituality deepened.

He began to teach his students that presence doesn’t require proximity.

“Even if someone is gone,” he told them, “their essence lingers — in objects, in habits, in air.

If you love purely, you become part of the eternal fabric.

That’s how souls recognize each other again — through vibration, not through form.”

At night, he often sat by the idol and whispered softly,

“Thank you for staying with me — not as memory, but as meaning.”

And perhaps, somewhere, Renu too sat near her glass Ganesh, whispering into the quiet,

“Thank you for teaching me how to feel forever.”

🏧

💛 End of Chapter – Non-Living Things Do Live By

Chapter 13 – The Regression

Life had become steady again.

Rakesh had accepted his peace, his work, his family — the calm rhythm of normalcy.

But normal was an illusion; beneath its still surface, memories kept their quiet current.

Every morning after his prayers, he'd light a diya before the small Ganesh idol.

It was still broken, still incomplete — and yet, it glowed.

He no longer prayed for anything specific; he only folded his hands and whispered,

"Thank you for everything — even what didn't stay."

Echoes in a child's laughter

One Sunday, while his daughter was playing, he noticed her singing a tune — soft, almost nostalgic.

He paused. It was the same old Hindi song Renu used to hum over calls:

“Teri yaad sanam, jab bhi sataye…”

He blinked, startled.

“Beta, yeh gaana tumhe kisne sikhaya?”

She shrugged innocently. “Bas, TV pe suna tha. Accha laga.”

He smiled faintly, but his heart trembled.

Somewhere in the invisible threads of existence, the past was still alive — singing, breathing, remembering.

3M

Signs in stillness

A week later, he was helping his wife clean a cupboard when a letter fell out from an old envelope.

His wife said, “Yeh kya hai? Bahut purana lagta hai.”

He picked it up — the paper yellowed, but the handwriting unmistakable.

It was Renu's letter — the one he thought he had lost.

He sat down quietly, opened it, and read her words again:

"Please take care of your parents. You have a rare heart."

Tears welled up, but they were not heavy anymore.

They were gentle, like rain that blesses rather than drowns.

He looked upward and murmured,

"I did what you asked for, Renu. I took care. Maybe that's what you came to teach."

Dreams that remembered

That night, Rakesh dreamt of a large courtyard filled with light.

He stood beneath a tree, watching a woman dressed in simple white walking toward him — calm, glowing, unhurried.

She didn’t speak; she simply smiled and touched his forehead.

The next morning, he woke with a strange peace.

He couldn’t remember her face clearly, but he knew the feeling — it was her.

Later that day, during his meditation, he heard the voice of his guru from a recent talk playing softly in his mind:

“Sometimes, souls meet not to complete each other, but to remind each other who they are.

When the reminder is done, life separates them — but the lesson remains eternal.”

Rakesh opened his eyes, whispering,

“So this is not loss… it’s awakening.”

3M

The mirror life

Meanwhile, in another city, Renu had her own reflections.

She had a daughter too — same age as Rakesh's.

One evening, while helping her with homework, the little girl suddenly asked,

"Mumma, do you believe in past lives?"

Renu smiled, surprised. "Why do you ask, beta?"

"Because sometimes, I dream of another place… and there's a man there who looks sad, but he smiles when he sees me."

Renu froze, a chill passing through her spine.

"What does he say to you?" she whispered.

"Nothing," the girl said. "He just folds his hands like this"—she joined her palms innocently—"and then disappears in light."

That night, Renu couldn’t sleep.

She kept staring at the Ganesh idol on her shelf — the same green glass one her daughter had insisted on buying.

For the first time, she realized that even though she had tried to erase her past, the universe had not.

3M

The karmic clarity

Weeks later, during a deep meditation session, Rakesh experienced what felt like regression.

His breath slowed, his thoughts vanished, and a flood of visions appeared — flashes of a past far older than this life.

He saw himself as a monk in white robes, standing at a riverside, watching someone sail away.

The woman in the boat turned once, smiled, and said,

“We’ll meet again — when lessons are complete.”

He woke up trembling, heart pounding but calm.

For the first time, he felt no ache, no question.

Just a deep acceptance: that their story was never meant to end in marriage; it was meant to end in understanding.

He wrote in his diary that night:

“Some people enter your life to fulfill promises from another birth.

When the debt is paid, destiny releases you both — not out of cruelty, but out of compassion.”

The divine balance

Renu, on her side, found herself drawn more deeply into spirituality.

She practiced Reiki with a new serenity — no longer to heal wounds, but to send blessings.

One evening, as she placed her palms together, she whispered,

“Wherever you are, I’m grateful we met.”

And at that exact moment, across the world, Rakesh smiled unknowingly during his meditation.

He felt a sudden warmth around his heart, like sunlight breaking through clouds.

He whispered,

“I forgive everything, even time.”

🔲

💛 End of Chapter – The Regression

Chapter 14 – “The Return: Searching for a New Beginning”

Rakesh stepped out of the airport into Delhi’s humid evening air and felt, for the first time in months, the weight of a decision settling on his shoulders. Singapore’s polished lights and efficient quiet were behind him — the city where he had tried to build proof of himself — and ahead were the familiar lanes, the same relatives’ faces, the same half-knowing smiles. Home smelled different now: of spices simmering longer than usual, of wet earth after a sudden shower, of incense that never went out no matter how far the family travelled.

He carried no grand announcement. No triumphant return. Only a small suitcase, a head full of plans, and a heart that had been bruised but not broken. He told himself he was coming back to rebuild. “Kuch naya shuru karna hai,” he told his mother when she hugged him at the doorstep, feeling the tremor of her concern through the fabric of her sari. She held him and said nothing — not because she did not care, but because the unsaid had become part of their language.

Jobs were harder here than in the city that demanded punctuality and productivity. In India he found forms, references, long waits, and the persistent question: “Kya foreign se aa rahe ho? Toh ummeed zyada hai.” People assumed that an overseas resumé meant instant success; they didn’t see the nights when he sat on the floor and wrote letters to himself in a language of courage.

He walked the familiar streets with a new map in his pocket — printed lists of interviews, agency phone numbers, the names of small firms that might need someone reliable. He met a manager at a mid-sized company who praised his Singapore experience but looked uncomfortable when Rakesh admitted he had left earlier than planned. “Why did you return?” the manager asked politely. Rakesh explained — family, responsibility, the need to start fresh. The manager nodded, then offered technical questions, spreadsheets, and a polite promise to call.

Calls came and went. Some interviews were encouraging, others indifferent. He got a junior position at a logistics firm for a month; then the company restructured. He took a freelance audit assignment that paid well but lasted only six weeks. Each job left him with small victories and larger anxieties. He was technically proficient, disciplined, and flexible — but his heart sometimes wandered, caught in

the memory of a hand held in a movie theater or the cracked glass Ganesh sitting in a drawer back at his mother's house.

People around him meant well. Old neighbours smiled like anchors: "Beta, ghar par aayo, humara sab sambhal lenge." There were relatives who offered condolence and advice in the same breath. The world suggested practical steps: save money, marry soon, secure family, then think of ambition. Yet Rakesh carried inside him a different timetable — one set under the peepal tree and on a cardboard chessboard. He wanted to be worthy before he asked another life to depend on him.

At night, when the house grew quiet, he sat with a cup of unsweetened tea and went through the day's applications. He wrote cover letters that read as quietly honest confessions. He told potential employers he could be relied upon — that he understood the math of responsibility. On one lonely night he folded a small scrap and wrote: "Main wapas aya hoon taaki main wo bandoon ka sahara ban saku, jinna ne mujhpe yakeen kiya." The paper felt like a talisman when he put it in his wallet.

Financial pressures were a constant hum. Hospital bills had not been small. Loan tenures whispered in his ear. His

sister tried to be practical — “Thoda patience, bhaiya. Ab sab theek ho jayega”— but he could see the lines of worry around her mouth. His mother busied herself with the kitchen and temple visits; sometimes, when she thought no one watched, she would stand at the doorway and watch him as if measuring his present against a memory of the boy who used to run barefoot on rainy days.

It was a strange thing: his skills opened doors, but emotion closed them again. At work he would be meticulous — checking invoices, meeting clients, delivering on promises — and yet the moment a task required a long steady focus, his mind would drift to a ringtone that no longer came. He found himself missing deadlines not out of laziness but because he had left a piece of himself on a night in a dark theatre.

Friends offered distractions. One introduced him to a consulting role; another suggested joining a startup. He tried them all. He sat in boardrooms and listened to strategies that felt like chess games with missing pieces. He adapted quickly — the old trait of being able to learn and survive — and sometimes it helped. He got short bursts of work that paid well and restored a little pride. But the stability he truly wanted — the kind that allowed a man to breathe without checking a balance sheet every hour — eluded him.

There were moments of awkward humour too. In an interview for a mid-level managerial role, a young HR asked him bluntly, “So why five job changes in two years?” He smiled, chose his words, and said, “Learning curve, ma’am. I like to find where I can contribute most.” She typed, unconvinced. The truth was harder: he changed because he was looking for himself as much as for a role. Each job was a mirror, and sometimes the mirror reflected a man who still carried the echo of a promise that had been broken by distance and vows.

He tried a small start-up where deadlines were urgent and bosses were many. There he felt useful for a while — his numerical instincts helped set order. But emotional exhaustion shows up in the smallest things: missed meetings, a delayed invoice, a curt email sent in the wrong tone. A client complained about a delay that Rakesh himself had caused by zoning out mid-task, and the boss, under pressure, let him go politely. “We wish you all the best,” the HR said, folding her palms in a practiced sympathy.

Each departure stung. Each rejection whispered the same worry: Kya main kabhi phir se settle kar paunga? He fought the thought. He reminded himself of Dada’s chess rule —

four moves ahead — and forced himself to plan the next step. But planning without a steady heart felt like drawing maps on water.

In quieter moments, he would meet an old friend at a chai stall and speak freely. He would tell stories of the peepal, of Dadi's hands, of Renu's laugh, and watch the friend's eyes soften. "Yaar, tu bahut strong hai," the friend would say. "Par kabhi kabhi, strength ka matlab tamasha nahi hota. Tu apne liye bhi thoda rah." Rakesh would smile, fold his hands, and say nothing.

There were small signposts of healing. A payment someday turned the ledger green. A client praised him, and for an hour he felt like a man again. He bought one small thing for himself — a new watch — and wound it with a hopeful hand, as if time could be reset.

Yet under every small victory, there was a ghost of memory. A song on the radio would stop him; a passing silhouette would make him pause. Once, returning late, he found a child playing with an old phone — the same model he had gifted years ago. He stood frozen, watching the child's innocent fingers, and felt the past bloom, not as pain only, but as a living ache. He told the friend next to

him: “Kuch cheezein wapas aa jaati hai. Cheezein nahin, yaadein.” The friend patted his shoulder and offered tea.

Rakesh kept looking for work. He kept trying. In the market he would speak to distant relatives who offered leads; in the evenings he sent polite follow-ups. He met a consultant who said gently, “You need to focus on one field and show continuity.” He nodded, but the continuity refused to be stitched easily. The knot in his chest had to loosen before anything else could.

And so, day by day, he walked the tightrope. He returned to the temple more often, lit the diya with a careful hand, and recited the mantras Dadi had taught him. He did what he could: he filed resumes, he attended interviews, he took short contracts. He made small maps on his wall of future possibilities, each one connected with a thread and a promise.

The return had not been dramatic. There was no grand rescue and no instant healing. But there was movement — a slow, aching choreography of attempts: of job interviews that sometimes succeeded; of roles that sometimes failed; of evenings where he allowed himself to sleep without replaying one particular ringtone.

In the quiet of the night, when the house slept and the fan hummed its old lullaby, he would place his palm on the cracked Ganesh box in the drawer and whisper, as if to a friend, “I will try again. For them. Aur apne liye bhi.” The promise was small, but it was the start — the first move after a long check on the board of his life.

Chapter 15 – Half-Settled, Half-Searching

Life has a strange way of testing those who try to do everything right.

Rakesh returned to India hoping to rebuild, but the truth of rebuilding is that it rarely follows a straight line.

Sometimes it looks like progress; sometimes it looks like repetition with different scenery.

In the next few years, he changed five jobs and worked under twenty-five different bosses — a rhythm that even he found unbelievable.

But each shift had a story.

Each resignation had a wound.

Each new beginning carried a question:

“Why can’t I settle?”

1. The First Job – Hope with Cracks

The first job he got after returning from Singapore was promising enough.

Good environment, manageable workload, a respectful boss.

He was efficient — quicker than most at numbers, sharper than many at structure.

He introduced a new filing system, cleared month-old reconciliations, and impressed two senior managers.

But in the middle of a routine meeting, while someone discussed quarterly targets, he drifted.

A ringtone from the next cubicle — a familiar soft two-note tone — froze his breath.

Renu used the same ringtone.

For a split second, he wasn’t in an office.

He was in a café in Jaipur where she once laughed suddenly because her phone rang while she was tasting his favorite kachori.

His hand trembled.

The manager called his name twice.

He snapped back, embarrassed.

Something inside him tightened — a reminder that even distance doesn't dilute memory.

Later, the boss gently told him, "Rakesh, your work is good, par focus thoda kaam hai. Try to steady your mind."

He nodded.

He tried.

But he couldn't fix what he didn't fully understand.

His contract wasn't renewed.

3M

2. The Second Job – Sharp Mind, Tired Soul

The second job paid better and demanded even more.

His analytical skills shone.

He solved issues quickly, took charge of complex reports, and even became a go-to person for crisis situations.

But his spirit was tired.

One evening, when the office was noisy with discussions and keyboards, a colleague casually said, “Yaar, I don’t know why, but you look like a man who remembers something the world forgot.”

That one sentence hit too close.

He had remembered too much —

too many unsaid things,

unfinished promises,

a goodbye he never fully accepted,

a silence he couldn’t break.

He stayed quiet more often at work.

He functioned like a machine — efficient but detached.

And detachment, in corporate environments, is seen as lack of “ownership.”

By the third month, his review reflected this.

“Excellent skills but low emotional engagement.”

He didn’t argue.

He left quietly.

3M

3. The Third Job – Learning New Fields, Losing Old Strength

The third job was different — a startup with young energy.

Chaos, creativity, pressure — he liked the unpredictability for a while.

It gave him something to focus on.

He became a part of the core team.

Managed accounts, helped with operations, handled vendor calls.

He worked late and sincerely.

But emotional exhaustion operates like a silent leak.

Some days he was sharp.

Some days he felt hollow.

Once, during a stressful week, he accidentally sent an email meant for internal discussion to a vendor.

It caused confusion.

The co-founder didn't shout — he simply sighed.

"Rakesh bhai, you're brilliant, but kahi na kahi dil nahin laga hua lagta hai."

And that was the truth.

His hands worked.

His brain worked.

But his heart — the same heart that once believed in two souls becoming one despite distance — now felt like it carried unprocessed grief.

He resigned again.

3M

4. The Fourth Job – Stability Outside, Storm Inside

The fourth job was respectable — a managerial role in a larger firm.

He wore shirts that fit better, carried files that felt heavier, and handled deadlines with practiced calm.

But something else began to happen.

He felt a sharp emptiness after every achievement.

If he finished a major task, there was no internal celebration.

If he received appreciation, the happiness lasted less than a minute.

His mother noticed the fatigue in his eyes.

She often sat quietly beside him while he worked late at night.

“Kya baat hai, beta?” she asked gently.

“Mann nahi lag raha?”

He smiled weakly.

“Nahin, bas thak gaye hain.”

But she knew.

Mothers always know.

She placed her hand on his head and whispered a prayer.

He closed his eyes, and for a moment, he felt the old peepal tree roots beneath him — steadying him.

But grounding is temporary when the heart is still wandering.

A project slipped.

A client got upset.

He felt responsible.

The guilt made it harder to function.

Six months later, he resigned again.

5. The Fifth Job – The Pattern Revealed

The fifth job was not glamorous, but it offered routine.

Rakesh hoped routine would heal him.

He managed tasks well.

He built rapport with the team.

He even cracked jokes sometimes.

But the problem wasn’t the job.

The problem was unresolved memory.

Small things triggered him:

- A girl in the office said “hello” like Renu.
- Someone wore the same perfume she once had.
- A colleague’s phone wallpaper had a Ganesh idol made of glass.
- A street vendor played “Mere Haath Mein Tera Haath Ho.”

He pretended to be fine.

He smiled.

He worked.

He helped colleagues.

But every few weeks, something from the past would visit him like an uninvited thought.

He would freeze momentarily… then return to work.

But bosses noticed the small dips.

One boss finally told him, “You are overqualified, underutilized, and emotionally drained. Tum bahut intelligent ho, Rakesh. But kuch tumhare andar fight chal rahi hai.”

For the first time, Rakesh didn’t deny it.

He simply said, “Haan.”

3M

Why He Couldn’t Settle

People often assumed he was indecisive or overly ambitious.

But the truth was this:

He had unhealed emotional debt.

Not financial debt.

Not karmic debt.

Emotional debt.

The silence between him and Renu — the sudden severing —

the unanswered questions —

the vow taken by her mother —

the inability to find closure —

the breakup without a goodbye —

the love that wasn't "used" but "left hanging" —

All of it became a quiet anchor tied to his chest.

He smiled.

He functioned.

But inside, something still waited to be acknowledged.

The Turning Point of This Chapter

One evening, during a simple team meeting, his mind drifted again.

The boss called his name sharply.

He apologized.

But afterward, sitting in his parked car, staring out at streetlights that looked like blurred halos, he whispered to himself:

“Why do I feel so unfinished?”

Tears collected, not as a break — but as a release.

He had carried everything silently for far too long.

The next day, he did something he hadn’t done in months.

He wrote a poem.

Not for anyone.

Not for Renu.

For himself.

It ended with:

“Main chal raha hoon par ruk ruk ke,

Dil jee raha hai par thoda thoda ke,

Zindagi toh aage badh rahi hai,

Par main… kahin beech mein reh gaya hoon.”

He folded the paper, placed it in his drawer, and stared at the ceiling for a long time.

For the first time, he realized:

He wasn’t unstable.

He was unhealed.

And until he healed —

no job, no boss, no city would feel like home.

Chapter 16 – The Last Attempt to Heal

Eight months had passed since Rakesh had returned to India —

eight months of job trials, quiet victories, silent collapses,

and the unsteady search for a footing that refused to hold still.

He had told himself many things:

“Let it go.”

“It was destiny.”

“Both families chose different paths.”

He tried to believe all of it.

He tried to breathe beyond it.

He tried to bury the ache under work, under responsibilities, under routine.

But some memories don’t stay buried.

They float — quietly, insistently — like the faint scent of a flower pressed decades ago inside a closed book.

Every few weeks, he thought of calling her.

Every time, he stopped himself.

Fear mixed with dignity, hope mixed with hesitation.

Until one evening —

a simple, unremarkable evening —

something in him shifted.

3M

The trigger

He had just received confirmation of a new job offer — a stable role after months of turbulence.

His father’s health had improved.

His sister was smiling more.

The house felt lighter.

He should have felt relieved.

Instead, as he walked toward the metro station in the fading orange light, a breeze brushed past him in a way he hadn’t felt in years.

A soft, familiar, indescribable touch.

It startled him.

He whispered under his breath,

“Renu…”

The name didn’t hurt this time.

It simply existed — like an echo that had waited patiently to be acknowledged.

That night, lying on his bed in the dim light of the bedside lamp, the thought became a pulse.

Maybe I should talk to her.

Not to restart anything.

Not to disturb her life.

Just to… close the loop.

To say a respectful goodbye.

To give both hearts some peace.

He stared at the ceiling and after a long, trembling breath, he dialled her number.

His hands shook.

Not from fear —

from the weight of everything unsaid.

3M

The ringing

It rang once.

Twice.

Three times.

He felt the world slowing down around him.

The fan above hummed, the clock ticked, his heart thudded.

He wondered if she had changed her number.

Or perhaps she wouldn’t answer.

Perhaps destiny had already decided this chapter was over.

But on the fourth ring —

she picked up.

There was silence.

Heavy, sharp, electric silence.

He could hear her breathing very softly.

Just like the old days.

He closed his eyes.

“Hello…” he whispered.

His voice cracked despite his best effort.

On the other side, he heard her inhale —

a sudden, trembling breath.

She knew his voice instantly.

“Rakesh?”

Her voice was barely audible, like someone speaking from behind a closed door.

He swallowed.

“Renu… I just called to… to ask how you are.”

No accusation.

No question.

No pain hidden in the words.

Just a gentle, human wish to know she was okay.

Silence again.

He could almost hear her heart against the receiver.

He sensed conflict in her breath.

Something between longing and fear.

Then, softly, as if spoken with closed eyes, she said:

“Rakesh…

we shouldn’t talk.”

His chest tightened.

“But Renu — it’s been months.

I just… felt like calling.

To wish you well.

To clear the air.”

She breathed shakily.

There was tenderness in her pause —

like she wanted to say things she wasn’t permitted to say.

Then…

“Please…

don’t call again.”

Her voice broke on the last word.

He felt something collapse inside.

“Renu… why?”

It came out helpless, not demanding.

A long pause.

Then she whispered, voice trembling:

“Maa ne vow liya hai.”

A breath.

“Hum kabhi baat nahi kar sakte.”

Another breath, deeper this time — the kind people take when holding tears.

“And you know I cannot break my mother’s vow.”

Rakesh closed his eyes, pained.

He felt history, tradition, destiny — everything — pressing on both of them.

He spoke softly, “But Renu… do you want this?”

She didn’t reply.

He heard her breath turn uneven —

the kind that happens when someone is crying silently.

That was his answer.

After a moment, she whispered the last words she would ever say to him:

“Please… don’t call me again.

Take care of yourself.

Always.”

Then, before he could say anything,

before he could breathe,

before he could offer even a goodbye —

She disconnected.

Just a small, sharp click.

So ordinary.

So final.

So devastating.

After the disconnect

Rakesh sat still for a long time, phone resting loosely in his palm.

The room around him blurred.

The fan’s sound dissolved.

The clock stopped meaning anything.

He didn’t cry.

He didn’t collapse.

He didn’t shout.

He simply felt a quiet breaking —

the kind that doesn’t erupt…

the kind that slowly rearranges a person from the inside.

He whispered softly,

“Be happy, Renu. Wherever you are.”

Then he placed his phone on the table as if placing a feather that might fly away with any sudden movement.

He looked outside the window.

The streetlight glowed still.

Dogs barked.

Life continued.

But something inside him —

something tender, sacred, hopeful —

folded itself into silence.

He lay down on his bed, not to sleep, but to calm the storm inside.

And that night, he realized a truth he had never admitted:

Some goodbyes don’t happen with words.

Some happen with silence.

Some with vows.

And some with a single disconnected call.

The impact

The next morning, he woke up quieter.

Lighter, in a strange way.

As if the story had ended,

but the memory had chosen to stay —

not to hurt him,

but to shape him.

He understood now,

for the first time without resistance:

This was destiny.

This was karma.

This was the closure he was supposed to receive —

not the closure he had wanted.

And with that acceptance,

he stepped into a new life —

not healed,

not whole,

but ready to live forward.

Chapter 17 – Two Roads, Two Homes

Part A — Renu's Quiet Surrender

After the vow, life pressed on in the only way it knows — by filling every empty hour with work, chores, and small, necessary movements. Renu folded herself into this rhythm with a kind of practiced care.

The family pressure was steady, not loud. It arrived as polite questions at the dinner table and as practical solutions in hushed voices. "Kya humare liye koi rishta dekhna chahiye?" asked a relative one afternoon, as if suggesting a cup of tea. The question landed like a gentle tide on a shore that had once been stormy — it softened, then retreated, but left a line of foam that made her stop and think.

Renu tried to resist — briefly — out of habit and a stubborn whisper of self. But the house needed rest, her mother needed support that should not be delayed. Her sisters were busy with their lives. The neighborhood gossiped politely; the world offered a path that promised safety. She accepted a proposal that came through a trustworthy family friend — a calm man from a respected household, who spoke gently and had eyes that trusted easily.

The wedding was traditional, uncomplicated. It was beautiful in its ordinariness; strings of marigolds, a simple bridal lehenga, family hands that arranged everything like a choreography of acceptance. Renu moved through the rituals like someone stepping into a pre-stitched garment — it fit, but she sometimes wondered if it fit her soul. People told her she smiled well in red; they said she looked like a good match. Inside, she felt a wide, still lake where once waves had broken.

After marriage, she gradually retreated from the professional world. She stopped taking night shifts, then resigned. It was practical — the new household wanted stability; the in-laws preferred a woman who would be home in the evenings. Renu adapted. She took to the kitchen in the way of someone who learns a new language — clumsy at first, then fluent. She learned which masala

made which curry sing, how to mend a blouse, how to soothe a small child when it refused to sleep. Her hands, once quick with office files, now moved with a different meditation.

People around her noticed the change. “Renu has settled down well,” many said approvingly. She nodded and smiled. But in quiet corners — sometimes when she folded her daughter’s tiny frocks, sometimes when she lit a diya in the evening — a low, private ache surfaced. It was not the acuteness of heartbreak anymore; it was a gentle, persistent remembering, like a tune that returns in the half-light.

She was content in ways she had not expected. The home created its own joys — a child’s laugh, a respectful husband who listened, a mother-in-law who taught her how to press the perfect roti. She found pride in managing the routine, in gifting comfort to those around her. The sharp, curious girl who once wanted the world remained tucked beneath the new layers, like a pressed flower in a diary.

Sometimes she would think of Rakesh — not with anger, but with a quiet curiosity. Had he found peace? Was he happy? Would he ever remember her the way she did,

with a smile that folded into memory? She told herself often: Zindagi mein choices hote hain. Maine ek liya. That choice rippled forward, and slowly, life rearranged itself around that shape.

Part B — Rakesh's New Beginning (and the Simplicity That Heals)

Rakesh's path to remarriage was different — less of a surrender and more of an unexpected repair.

After months of half-settling jobs and searching for a rhythm, family friends introduced him to a prospective bride. She was simple, unassuming, and practical — not flashy, not probing. Their first meeting was traditional: polite questions, a cup of tea, the usual middle-class choreography. Rakesh spoke honestly, almost to his own surprise. Somewhere between the samosas and the conversation, he said, in a voice that still carried years of longing, "You must know about my past. A roka hua tha. Baatein hui, phir kuch misunderstandings. You may have heard something from aunty."

The girl smiled in a way that felt like sunlight finding a closed window. "No one told me. But thank you for telling

me," she said simply. "I know life is complicated. I don't want illusions. I want someone who is honest."

Honesty — that old, stubborn pillar he had learned under the peepal and on the chessboard — mattered to her. She didn't recoil. She didn't treat it like a scandal or a scar to be hidden. Instead, she treated it as a truth — something to be handled with care, not buried.

Their conversations were easy. She liked small things: a morning walk, plain dal-chawal, long phone calls on rainy afternoons. She complemented him in ways that felt practical and safe. Where he was careful, she was content. Where he was introspective, she was steady. For the first time after many restless nights, Rakesh felt a kind of ordinary comfort seep in — not the fire of dramatic love, but the reliable warmth of companionship.

They married in a small ceremony. No big declarations, no dramatic vows from the universe — just family, a few prayers, a few smiling faces. It was a humble beginning, but it came with something he had silently longed for: stability. He felt the pressure of old wounds ease when he saw someone who accepted his honesty and his history as part of him, not defects to be hidden.

They had children. He learned diaper-changing and lullaby-making in the same clumsy, tender way Renu had learned her household skills. He also kept shifting jobs — five jobs, twenty-five bosses — but the rhythm at home remained steady. His wife did not demand fireworks; she asked for presence, for small acts of care: a tea boiled when she was tired, a hand to steady a hanging photo frame, an honest conversation after dinner.

Yet the past did not leave him entirely. There were times when his mind wandered to an old mobile ringing in another life, or when the smell of sandalwood resurrected evenings near a home temple. Once, in a chance moment, during a family visit to a market, his daughter insisted on a small green glass Ganesh idol she had seen in a shop window. He bought it for her without thinking. That night, when he saw it on their shelf, he felt a familiar, bittersweet warmth — not a wound, but a soft bruise that told him: you loved once, deeply. That love became part of you.

His new marriage healed him slowly. It did not erase the past, but it taught him to live with it. His new wife's gentleness gave him space to hold his memories without being consumed by them. She was not a replacement for

what once was; she was a companion for what now could be built.

The Quiet Truth

Two homes. Two types of settlement. Both lives were honest and sincere, but in different ways. Renu's life became the careful tending of a hearth; Rakesh's life became a gentle rebuilding of a worn path. They both found family and children and routines that asked less of fate and more of everyday courage.

Yet beneath the surface — in a corner drawer, in an old mobile, in a cracked Ganesh idol — lingered a story that neither could fully untie. It did not haunt them as a ghost to be chased away. Instead it accompanied them like a song whose last stanza is always remembered.

They lived forward. They loved in new ways. But an old chord still hummed between them in the silence — a

reminder that some connections become part of a soul's map, showing routes not to possession but to growth.

Chapter 18 — Twenty Years Later: The Unfinished Thread

Twenty years lives like a slow river — it does not hurry, it carries things. Stones, leaves, a broken toy or two. For Rakesh and Renu the river had carried them far away from that first spark under city lights; it had also kept afloat a few things that would not sink.

Renu's home was full of small domestic music: a child's laughter, the hiss of cooking gas at lunch, the radio playing devotional bhajans in the evening. She moved through these rhythms with the quiet competence of someone who had learned to make a life a soft shelter. Her daughter, now a bright-eyed girl of seven, loved to dress dolls, hum out-of-tune songs, and insist on a glass Ganesh on the puja

shelf — the same glass Ganesh that once caught Renu's daughter's eye in a Jaipur market. The idol sat near the diya; its green surface held the warm smudge of many hands.

Rakesh's house hummed differently. There was more paperwork on the dining table, a laptop that turned on before dawn, and a child who argued expertly about which cartoons were educational. He had become a father, a husband, a man who could mend a leaking tap and make plain dal that tasted of home. Yet, even wrapped in the ordinary, parts of him still bore the texture of an unfinished story.

He had changed jobs often — five in ten years at least since that desperate return: projects, consultancies, short contracts. Colleagues called him adaptable; some called him restless. He had worked under many bosses — twenty-five, people joked — each one adding a small annotation to his CV and a deeper line to his face. He could learn anything quickly: a new software, a client's temper, the arcane rules of a different industry. His mind remained sharp, agile, practiced in the chess of work. But his heart was a different clock.

Whenever routine waned and a stillness came, old memories returned like guests who had a key. A ringtone on television, the scent of sandalwood from a neighbour’s puja, the sight of a green glass statue in a market stall — each could slide him into a lapse of remembering. He would be walking down a corridor and suddenly see the peepal leaves in his mind; he would be at a meeting and hear his daughter’s laughter overlay a line from a song that once played in a dark theatre.

One afternoon, his daughter found an old mobile at the back of a drawer while searching for a lost pencil. It was the model he had gifted someone long ago — small, a little scratched, its keyboard a relic. The child pressed buttons with delight. “Papa, iska game khelte hain!” she chirped.

Rakesh looked at the phone. For a moment the room stopped: the light gusted, a memory breathed in. He remembered the first time he had wrapped such a phone and hit Send on a message that was a beginning; he remembered the night hunger, the airport goodbyes, the coffee shop hands. He felt suddenly younger and older at once.

He took the phone from her and sat on the sofa. His daughter perched beside him and asked him to tell a story.

He hesitated. Then he began, one small sentence at a time, the way one opens a wound to clean it and then bandage it lovingly.

“Do you want a true story or a fairy one?” he asked.

“True,” she said, earnest.

So he told her. He spoke of a time when two young people met at a coffee shop, when a roka happened with family blessings, when a broken glass Ganesh meant something ominous and small. He told her — not to scandalize — but to explain, to weave meaning. He told her of his Dadi and the peepal tree; of the chessboard in a shop; of the poem he once wrote on a night when everything seemed fragile.

His daughter listened with wide eyes. When he reached the part where Renu’s mother had taken a vow, she frowned. “Why would someone take such a promise?” she asked, puzzled by adult logic.

Rakesh placed the old phone gently beside the Ganesh on the low table. “Sometimes people make choices that they

think will protect them," he said slowly. "But choices are complicated. They can hurt and heal both at once."

That night he met an old friend at a roadside stall. They sipped chai and watched the world move — two men who had known each other since college, both carrying years like a folded map.

"Tell me again," the friend said, stirring sugar into his cup, "tell me how it all started."

Rakesh told him again, perhaps because telling things aloud had become a way to keep them civilized instead of monstrous. He spoke of the silence that followed the final call, of the vow that severed the open line. He spoke of the many jobs, the shifting bosses, the restlessness that refused to be labeled.

The friend listened and then said something Rakesh had heard before but never quite accepted. "Yaar, I think tum dono ka kuch karmic thing ho gaya hai. Kahi deep binding ho gaya hai — a karma bandhan. Ye sirf is janam ka masla nahi lagta. Log kai baar aise hi bandhte hai. Dono alag alag life jeete hue bhi, andar se connected rehte hai."

Karma bandhan — the words hung in the night air like incense smoke. Rakesh pondered them. All this time he had circled between logic and surrender, charts and chants. Now someone named the thing that felt nameless.

He didn't reject it. Over the years he had seen signs — the reappearing Ganesh, the old phone, the echoing songs, the coincidental 9:00 a.m. breeze he sometimes felt as if summoned. Perhaps the universe kept a ledger of feelings too, not just of accounts. Perhaps some bonds were beyond ledger balance.

In quiet moments he began to think of rebirth not as a fear but as a curious book left half-read. If the past life writes its chapter unfinished, maybe it waits for the next edition to complete the sentence. He had never been a man of superstition without reason; his chess training taught him to think ahead. But now he started thinking in cycles — of seeds and seasons and return.

One evening, Rakesh took out his old journal. Pages had yellowed; margins were full of chess notations and lines of verses. He read the poem he had written long ago — the

one his sister had teased him about, the one that had once felt like confession and now read like prophecy:

“Ek kavita likh raha hoon main apni jaan ke liye,

Wo jo jeene ka maksad hai aur armaan bhi mera…”

He smiled sadly and folded the page into his wallet. Outside, a wind stirred the jasmine plant beside the balcony and some leaves brushed the lights.

Renu, at her home, folded her child’s school uniform and thought of a life she had stitched carefully. She visited her in-law’s temple, lit a lamp, and silently sent out a blessing — not to ask but to be grateful. Sometimes she wondered about the man who had once held her hand in a dark theatre and had written her a poem. Sometimes she felt the same breeze on her face and smiled for no reason.

Their lives had grown full and ordinary. Their children laughed, argued, and filled their days. They had built futures that did not depend on the past. Yet an unfinished thread ran like a thin gold line through both their stories — neither powerful enough to wreck their present nor small enough to be dismissed.

Later, when Rakesh sat on a bench by the peepal sapling he had once planted for his daughter, he realized the truth in the friend's words. Karma did not always mean punishment; sometimes it meant lesson, sometimes it meant promise. He had been taught to plan four moves ahead, but life often plays outside the board. Some moves require waiting for the next life to play out.

He closed his eyes, intoned a quiet Hanuman Chalisa he had not chanted in full for many nights, and felt, briefly, the map of his life lighten as if ink had dried into a readable sentence. The ache remained, but the ache had shifted: not only pain, but reverence — for a love that had taught him responsibility, for a silence that had taught him surrender.

He rose and walked home, the old mobile in his pocket, the green Ganesh safe on the child's shelf, and in the quiet that came before sleep he whispered, for himself and for the one who perhaps listened from afar:

"Jab tak jude hue hai, kahin na kahin phir milenge. Agar wo likha hai kisi kitaab mein, to padh lenge, phir se."

The river of twenty years kept flowing, slow and sure. It had carried hearts apart, and in its deep, patient way, it preserved the memory of a promise — not to trap two lives forever, but to teach both how to be whole even when a piece of them kept remembering.

“Kasam: The Vow That Should Never Be Taken”**

Any vow taken in anger, fear, ego, or over-attachment is not dharma —

it is bondage (bandhan).

A vow made without wisdom becomes:

- a karmic knot
- a generational curse
- an obstacle to spiritual liberation

- a reason for rebirth

🌿 Spiritual Message:

A vow that stops two souls from resolving their karma

forces them to meet again.

Maybe in another time.

Another body.

Another birth.

🌿 Sanatan Dharma perspective:

In Sanatan thought:

- A vow is sacred.
- But a vow that blocks forgiveness is sinful.
- A vow that blocks destiny is against rta (universal order).
- And a vow that blocks love is against prem tattva (the nature of love).

**Kasam kabhi bhi uss baat ki nahi leni chahiye jisse kisi ka bhavishya bandhan ban jaaye.

Vow should never become poison.

Vow should never become prison.

Freedom dissolves karma.

Bondage creates more births.**

🌿 A final reflection:

*“Agar maa ne wo kasam nahi khayi hoti…

shayad do logon ka jeevan purn ho jata.

Aur kyuki kasam khayi gayi…

ek adhuri kahani phir se janam maangegi.”*

🌿 Closing Line:

“Kuch rishte toot kar bhi nahi todte.

Kasam sirf sharir alag karti hai —

atma to apna rasta dobara dhoond leti hai.”

3M

Chapter 19 – “Kasam: The Vow That Should Never Be Taken”

Zindagi, apni saari uljhanon ke saath, ek baat bahut gehri taur par samjha deti hai —

jo baat hum gusse, darr, ya zidd mein bol dete hain,

wo aksar saalon ka bandhan ban jaati hai.

Aur agar wo baat kasam ke roop mein baandh di jaaye,

to wo sirf ek pal ka faisla nahi hota.

Wo do logon ke poore jeevan ki disha badal deta hai.

3M

I. Kasam: The Poison You Swallow Thinking It Will Save You

Renu ki maa ne wo kasam li thi —

shayd beti ki hifazat ke liye,

shayd apne dard ko dhoop se bachaane ke liye,

shayd apne hi dar ke aage jhuk kar.

Par ek sach hai:

Kasam kabhi bhi ankhoon se nahi aati,

wo hamesha dil ki kamzori se paida hoti hai.

Aur yeh kasam…

- ek pyaar ko rok gayi
- do zindagiyaan alag kar gayi

- do gharon ke raaste badal gayi
- do bachchon ka bhavishya naya mod le gaya
- aur do atmaon ka karm-phal adhoora chhod gayi

Insaan samajhta hai kasam se izzat bachi rahegi.

Par woh bhool jaata hai —

kasam insaan ko nahi bachati,

kasam usse baandh deti hai.

3M

II. Karmic Binding: Jab Breakup Se Zyada Kasam Dard Deti Hai

Rakesh aur Renu ne yeh baat kabhi zabaan se nahi kahi,

par dono ne mehsoos ki —

Woh ek chhoti si kasam

unke jeevan ke beech mein

ek deewar ban kar khadi ho gayi.

Pyaar ki baat nahi thi yahaan.

Rishton ki baat nahi thi.

Log kya kahenge, society kya sochegi —

inn sabse zyada bhaari thi ek maa ki kasam.

Renu ka phone kaat dena

sirf ek action nahi tha.

Wo ek karz tha,

ek bandhan,

jo usne apni maa ki kasam nibhaane ke liye chuna.

Rakesh samajhta tha —

uski maa ki marzi bhi thi

ke wo iss baat ko piche chhod de.

Do maaon ke beech li gayi ek kasam

ne do dilon ki kahani ko band kar diya.

Aur kahani band ho kar bhi

khatam nahi hui.

Yahi karmic bandhan hai.

Jahan kahani ruk jaati hai,

par atma ruki hui nahi maanti.

3M

III. The Moral: Kasam Should Never Block Destiny

Sanatan parampara yeh kehti hai:

- Vow tabhi uttam hai jab wo dharma ko badhe
- Vow tabhi pavitra hai jab wo prem ko poshan de
- Par jo vow pyaar, shanti, kshama, ya sachchai ke raaste ko rok de —

wo adharma hai

Ek baat sadaa yaad rakhni chahiye:

“Jo kasam do dilon ko milne se roke,

wo kasam nahi, bandhan hoti hai.”

Kasam ka matlab qubooliyat nahi hota.

Kasam ka matlab samarpan nahi hota.

Kasam ka matlab kabhi bhi kisi ko rokna nahi hota.

Kasam ka matlab hota hai:

Sahi ka sahara, galat ka virodh —

na ki pyaar aur karm ko tod dena.

3M

IV. The Spiritual Truth: Vows Create Rebirths

Dono ne apni zindagiyaan jee li:

- Alag shehers mein

- Alag logon ke saath
- Alag zimmedariyon mein
- Alag khushiyon aur dukhon ke saath

Par phir bhi,

kahin deep mein,

dono ek hi sawal le kar chale:

“Agar kasam nahi hoti to kya hota?”

Is sawal ka koi jawaab nahi.

Lekin iska asli arth hai:

Kuch kahaaniyan poori nahi hoti —

kyunki unhe agle janam mein poora hona hota.

Kasam ne unhe yeh janam alag kar diya.

Par kasam ne hi unka karm-yog phir se bandh diya —

Ek adhoora karm phir se poora hone ke liye janm maangega.

Yehi hi sansaar ki prakriti hai.

Yehi hi atma ka kartavya hai.

3M

V. The Final Wisdom: Never Take a Vow That Interferes With Love or Destiny

Insaan ki sabse badi galti yeh hoti hai

ki wo sochta hai:

“Kasam le kar main kisi ko bacha lunga.”

“Kasam se rishta mazboot ho jayega.”

“Kasam se galtiyan ruk jayengi.”

Par sach ye hai:

Kasam sirf bhavishy ko bandhti hai,

atmaon ko nahi.

Atma apna rasta dobara dhoond leti hai.

Uski yaadein, uske rishte, uske karm —

sab wapas aate hain.

Isliye:

**Kasam kabhi bhi uss baat ki nahi leni chahiye

jisse kisi ki zindagi ki dhara toot jaaye.**

Kasam tabhi lo jab wo tumhe azad kare,

kabhi bhi tab nahi jab wo tumhe baandh de.

Pyaar ko roka nahi ja sakta.

Samay ko roka nahi ja sakta.

Karm ko roka nahi ja sakta.

Aur agar kisi kasam ne roka bhi —

to atma phir se janam legi

sirf apna adhoora karm poora karne ke liye.

3M

Closing Lines

Jisse door rehne ki kasam hai khayi, jab yaad usi ki aayi to phir…

Usko dekh ke to main mooh fer loonga, magar mere aaine mein wo nazar aayi to phir…

Uski gali mein to maine jaana chhod diya, kabhi meri gali mein wo aayi to phir…

Uski tasveer to maine kab ki phaad di, magar har chehre mein wahi nazar aayi to phir…

Kahi door aasman mein jo hawa ka jhonka hoga, uspe

kahin to kisi ka naam likha hoga…

Ye duniya agar bani hai ehsaas ke samundar se,

Kisi janm ka baaki dard ya kisi janm mein phir se wo ehsaas

likha hoga…

Chapter 20 – The Cosmic Connection

There are some stories that time cannot end.

They simply shift their form — from touch to thought, from sound to silence, from name to namelessness.

Rakesh had reached that place of peace where remembrance no longer hurt.

It healed.

He had stopped trying to understand love; he had begun to live it.

It wasn't about Renu anymore — it was about the divine spark that her presence had awakened within him.

He realized that every person we love deeply is a reflection of the Eternal — the Supreme One reminding us, "You too are capable of this purity."

The vibration of oneness

One evening, while meditating at his ashram, Rakesh reached a state of deep stillness.

The air around him shimmered softly, and he felt himself dissolve — boundaries fading, body forgotten.

In that silence, a vision arose.

A gentle light, radiant and golden, appeared before him.

Within it, he saw Renu — calm, smiling, free.

No words passed between them, but understanding flowed effortlessly.

“You found peace,” her voice echoed without sound.

“So did you,” he replied in his heart.

The light around them merged until there was no “you” and “I” — only presence.

And then, a whisper —

“Some souls don’t meet to stay together; they meet to remind the other of eternity.”

When he opened his eyes, the world looked softer, brighter, newer.

He smiled faintly. “So this is what love becomes when it matures — pure light.”

3M

The eternal rhythm

Back in her home, Renu was teaching her daughter meditation.

“Sit still, beta,” she said. “Breathe, and imagine someone who brings you calm.”

The little girl smiled.

“Mumma, I already see him. He’s sitting near a river, and the wind is blowing.”

Renu’s heart paused for a moment.

She didn’t correct her — she just smiled.

Maybe souls remember what even mothers forget.

She folded her hands and whispered,

“May this peace continue, lifetime after lifetime.”

3M

The divine realization

Months later, Rakesh visited a Himalayan retreat for a week of silence.

On the final morning, during sunrise, he stood facing the golden peaks.

A monk beside him said softly,

“Do you know why we meet certain souls and lose them?”

Rakesh turned.

The monk smiled.

“Because love is not meant to complete us — it’s meant to awaken us.”

Rakesh closed his eyes and whispered a prayer — not for reunion, but for gratitude.

“Thank you, Renu… for being my awakening.”

He released his breath into the cool mountain air, and it felt as though the wind carried it far away — maybe to another city, maybe to another soul.

The cycle of souls

In the unseen rhythm of existence, two souls continued their dance.

They had lived their human chapters — now their energies intertwined in the timeless cycle.

Rakesh once wrote, before closing his final journal:

“If karma binds us, may this bond be divine.

If rebirth exists, may our souls meet again —

not to suffer, not to seek,

but to recognize, remember, and rise.”

He folded the page, placed it beside the Ganesh idol, and lit a diya.

The flame swayed gently — a soft, golden affirmation.

3M

The eternal promise

Years later, when Rakesh’s daughter visited the ashram after his time had passed, she found his diary open to that page.

She read the final lines written in his calm handwriting:

“True love doesn’t end.

It becomes light —

guiding both souls

until they meet again.”

She smiled, closed the diary, and placed a single white flower beside it.

Outside, the wind blew — soft, scented, familiar.

Perhaps from another lifetime, perhaps from another promise.

And somewhere, beyond the veil of form and name,

Rakesh and Renu smiled together once more —

not in the world’s eyes, but in the eternal heart of the universe.

💛 End of Chapter – The Cosmic Connection (Final Chapter)

🕊️ Epilogue - Beyond Life

*“You know the power of Love —

As they both think of each other,

They both have changed their world and themselves accordingly.

The one who used to be sincere and tough now lives casually and calm,

The other who was fun-loving and free is now sincere and still.

Teri yaad sanam jab bhi sataye, saath mere rehti hai hawaaye,

Ek thandi hawa ke jhonke ne ehsaas tera banaya rakha,

Mar gaye hote ab tak to, tere pyaar ne humko jeena sikhaya.”*

💫 Final Thought:

“Unsey milne ki khwahish hamesha man mein rahi,

Unsey milne se pehle aur baad mein bhi man mein rahi,

Na jaane kyun unsey mil kar bhi wo unsey na mil paaya,

Shayad unsey mil kar dil jo khud se juda ho gaya.”

🔳

✨ The End – or perhaps, The Beginning of Another Birth.

🔳